SPECIAL ISSUE!

BUH-BYE 2005

BLENDER

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO MUSIC AND MORE

217 REASONS THIS YEAR DIDN'T COMPLETELY SUCK, AFTER ALL!

YEAAAH, YEAAAH!

KELLY CLARKSON

AMERICA'S FAVORITE GUILTY PLEASURE [BESIDES PUGGLES]

+

READERS' POLL RESULTS

YOU LOVE GREEN DAY, NOT SO MUCH JACKO

SEX, DRUGS & DELI TRAYS

BACKSTAGE WITH

U2

COLDPLAY

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

KANYE WEST

AND

FALL OUT BOY

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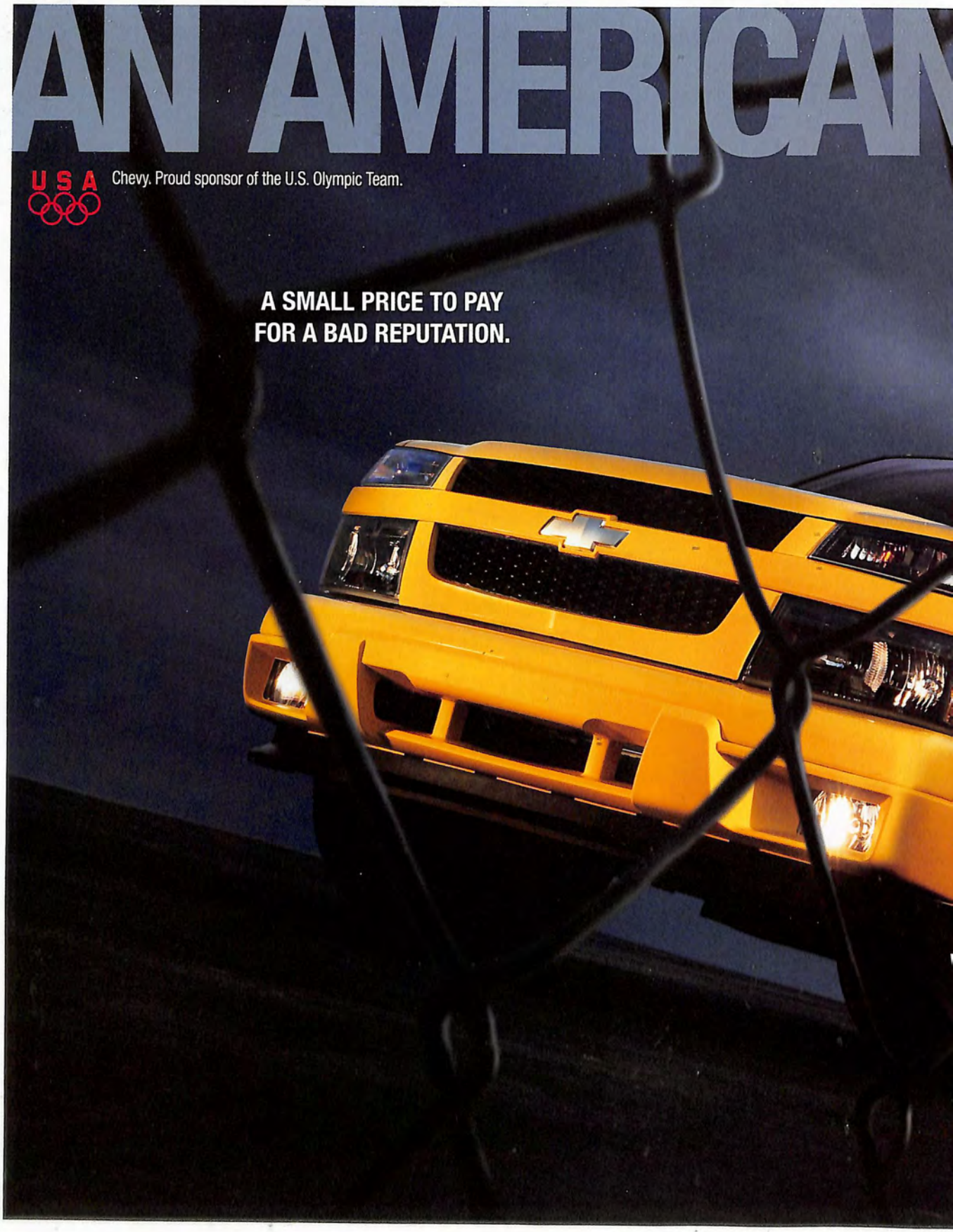

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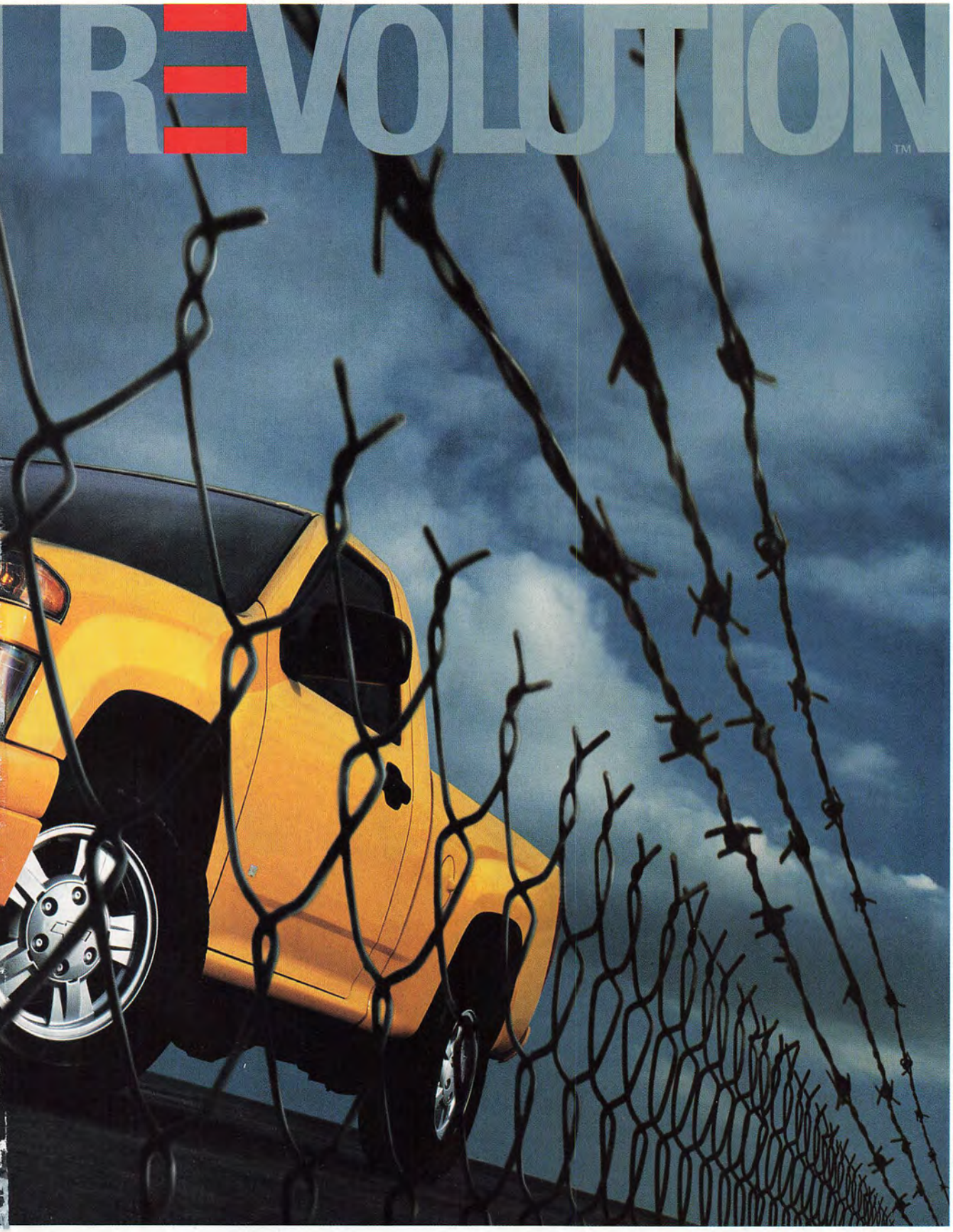

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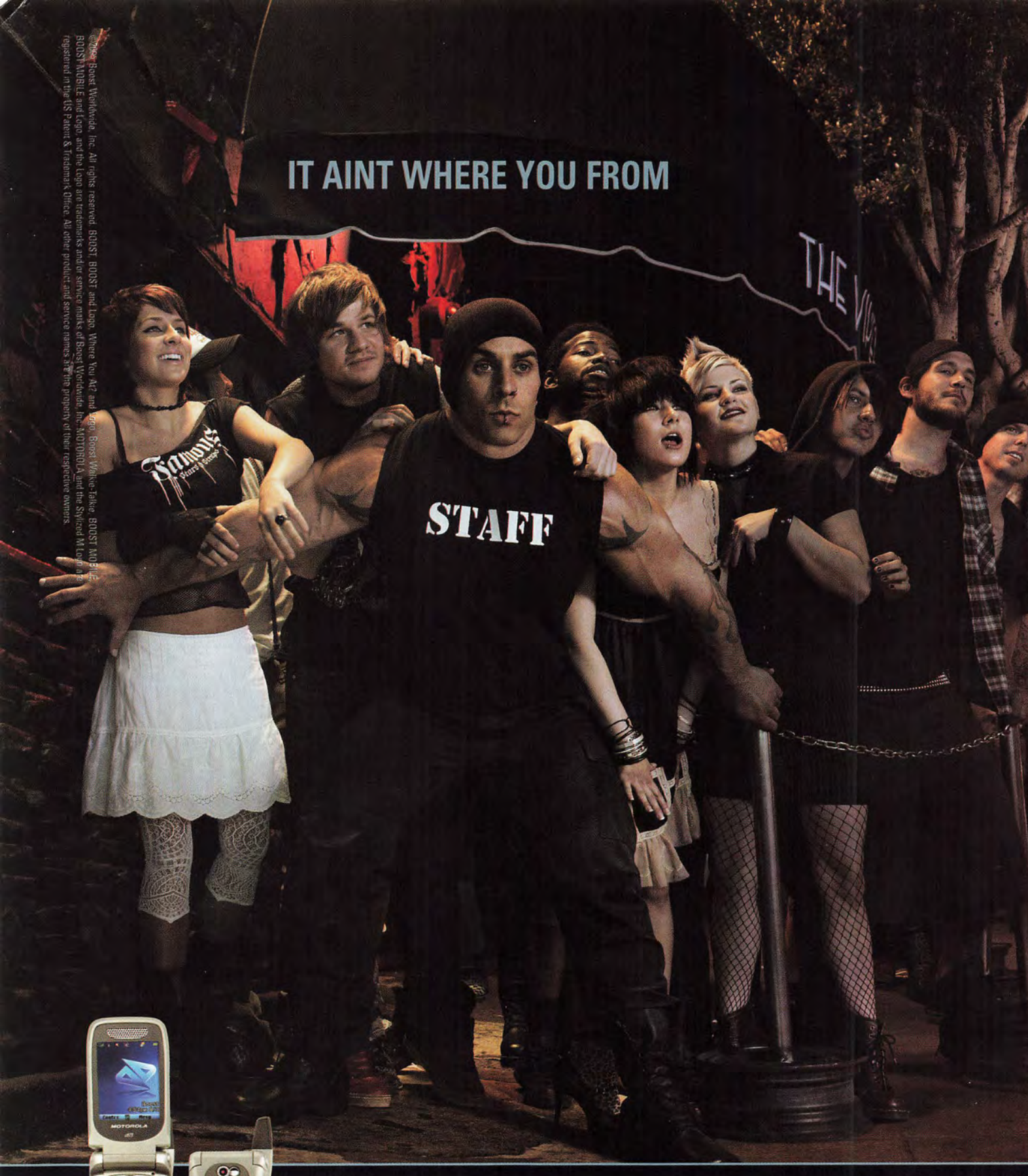

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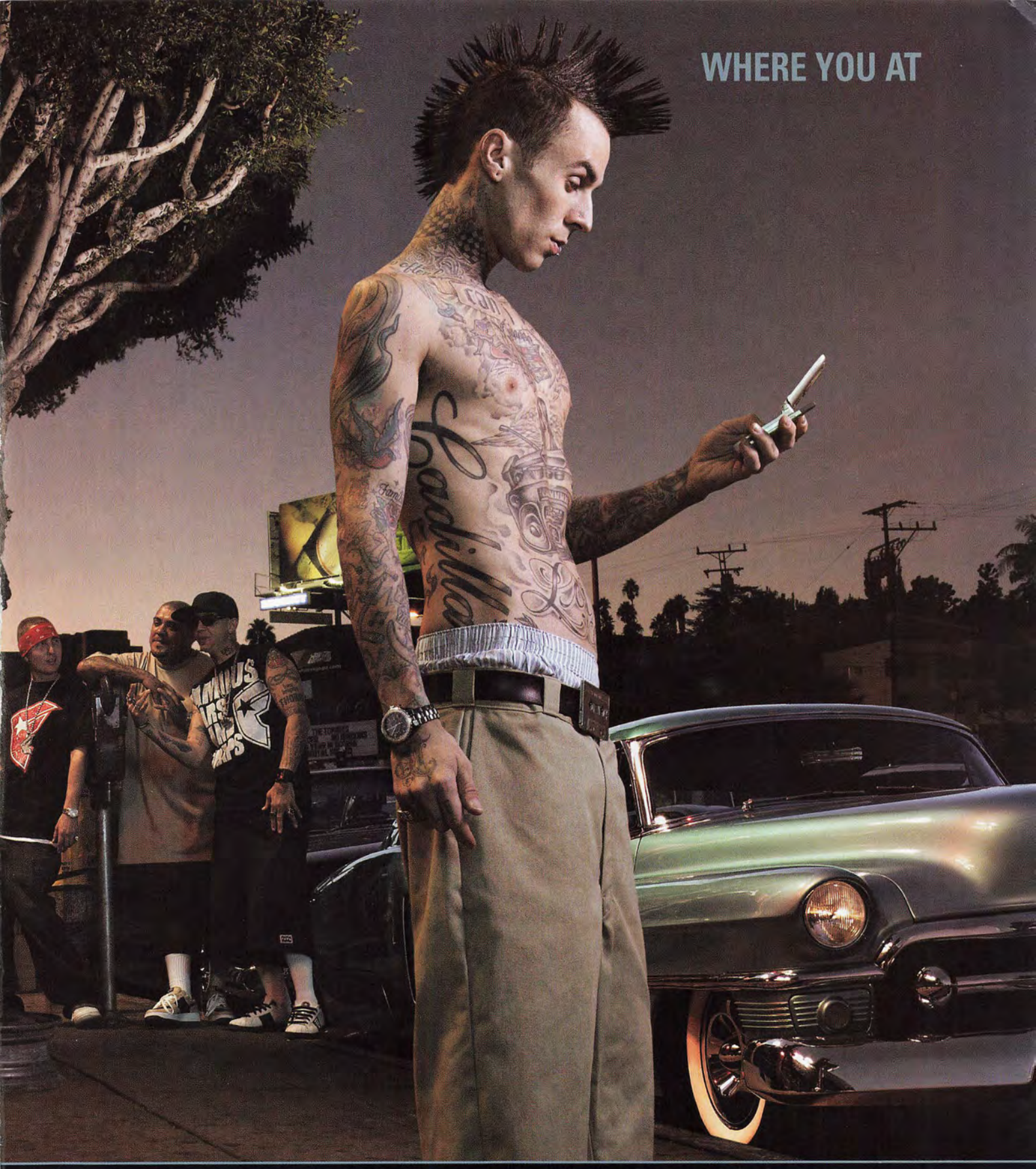
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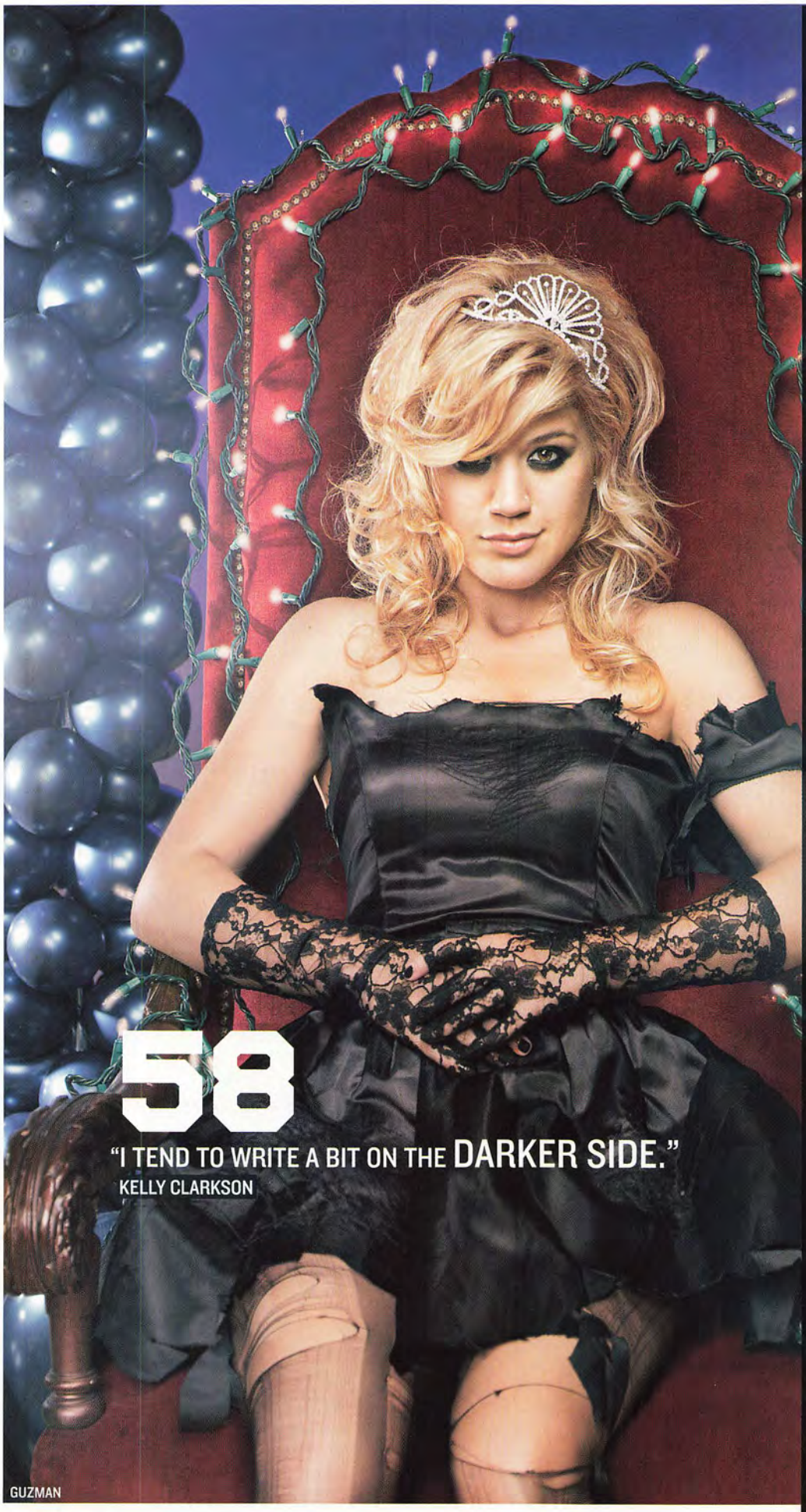

BLENDER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2006

54 2005 READERS' POLL
We ask the questions, you send us the answers, we pretend to take your opinions seriously. It's our annual readers' poll!

58 WOMAN OF THE YEAR: KELLY CLARKSON
Here are four words for why Kelly is our Woman of the Year: Since. U. Been. Gone. Oh, and three more: Not. Clay. Aiken. OK, last three: Likes. To. Drink.

66 THE 50 BEST CDS OF 2005
We got Dirty South hip-hop, we got indie garage postpunk, we got avant-folk-funk-weirdness. If you're gonna buy only 50 CDs this year, buy these.

74 THE 100 BEST SONGS OF 2005
This year's list of the best singles truly runs the gamut of musical styles, from Kelly Clarkson's "Since U Been Gone" to, uh … Kidz Bop's "Since U Been Gone."

80 WE'RE WITH THE BAND!
Want to hang out backstage with all your favorite artists? Well, too bad—you can't. But *we* can—and look, we took pictures!

88 $848 WITH JUELZ SANTANA
What do you think Harlem hip-hop upstart Juelz Santana did when *Blender* gave him $848 to blow any way he chose? Hint: It involved strippers.

58

"I TEND TO WRITE A BIT ON THE **DARKER SIDE.**"
KELLY CLARKSON

GUZMAN

ON THE COVER

KELLY CLARKSON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY GUZMAN

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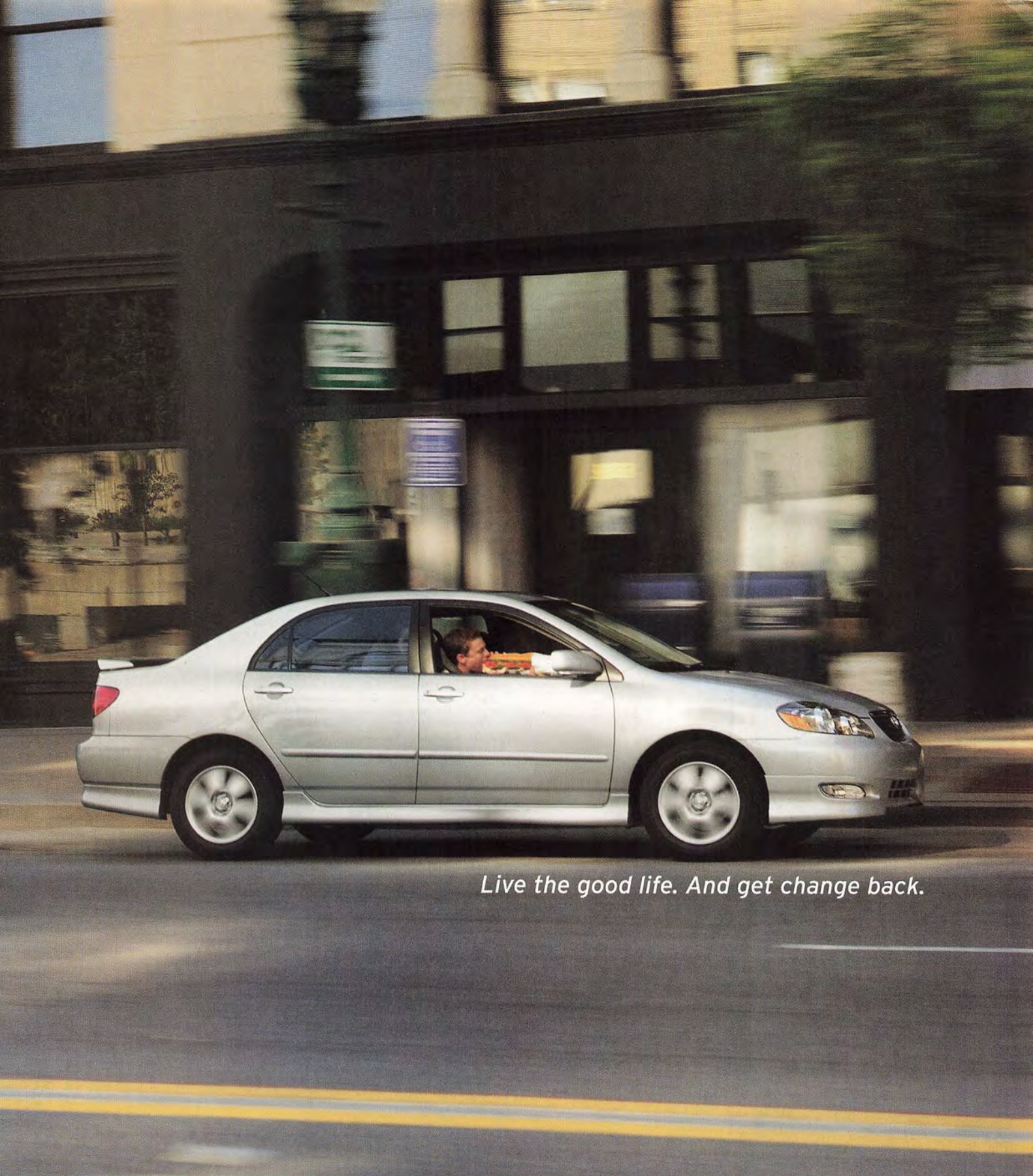
WE ARE SCIENTISTS: JITTERY GUITARS AND ANXIOUS VOCALS.

F. SCOTT SCHAFER

STYLIST: LYANI POWERS; GROOMING: AMENEH FOR WARREN TRICOMI; LEFT TO RIGHT: SHIRT: FACCONABLE; SWEATER: ORIGINAL PENGUIN; PANTS: ROSASSEN; RING, GOLD TOOTH: GANGSTAGOLD.COM; TURTLENECK: ANDREA FENZI; TOOTH: GANGSTAGOLD.COM; SHIRT: TRIPLE 5 SOUL; SWEATER: ORIGINAL PENGUIN; PANTS: KENNETH COLE; TIE: BLACK DOG 8



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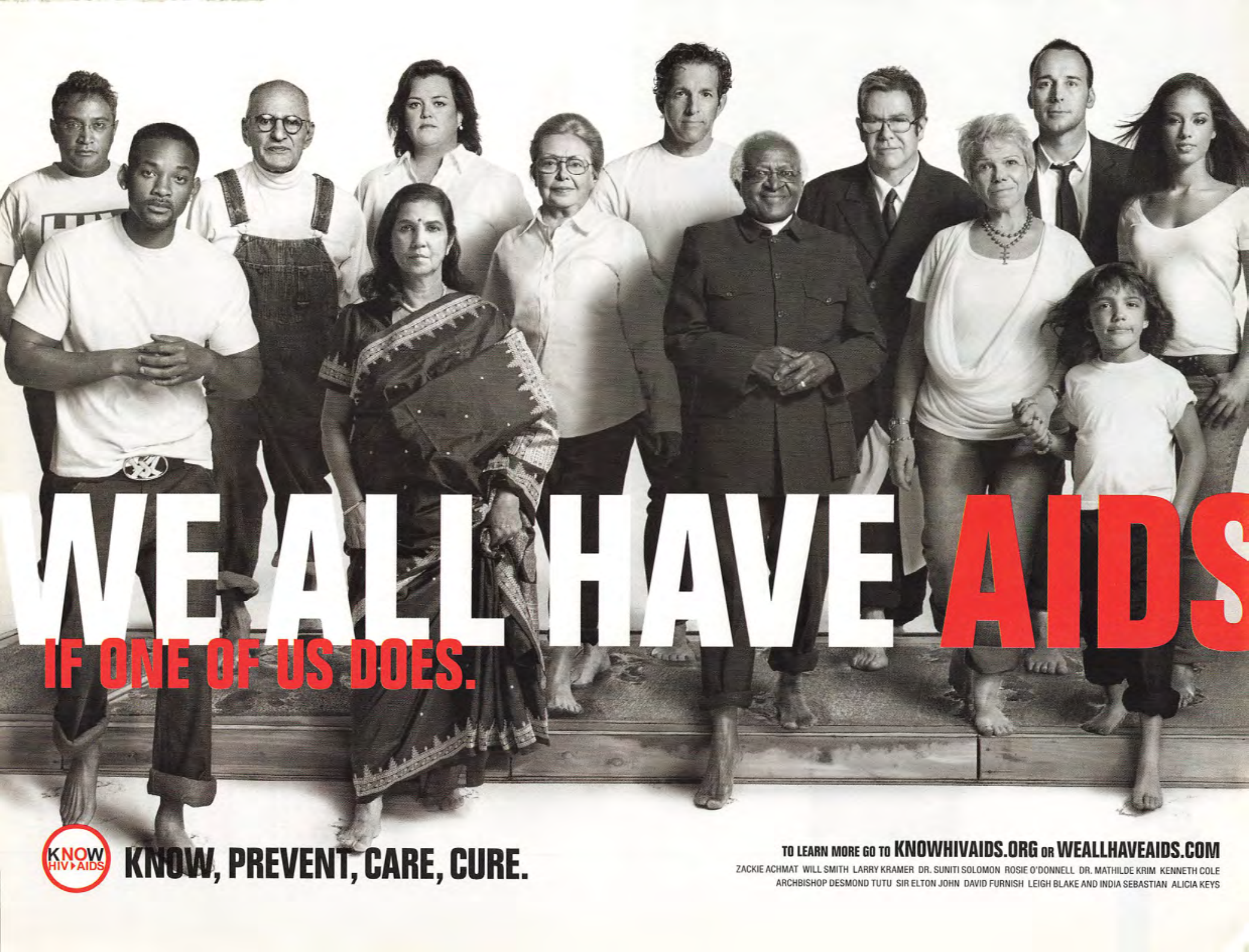
KENNETH CAPPELLO (KANYE WEST BACKSTAGE AT THE RYAN CENTER, UNIV. OF RHODE ISLAND, OCT. 26, 2005)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You've Got Mail

WE WANT YOU TO SHARE ...

TUCKER AND TUPAC

The lyrics ("I hope I'm forgiven for thug livin' when I die") on the spine of your December issue are from Tupac's "If I Die 2Nite." But I'm confused, since 2Pac "allegedly" died a while back—could you have been honoring C. Dolores Tucker, the infamous activist against gangsta rap and Tupac's nemesis? Interesting way to commemorate her passing—I hope she was able to forgive him his thug living by the time she died.

JANEY GAHAR, TRURO, MA

BLAST FROM THE PAST

First, Daft Punk on your list of "The 500 Greatest Songs Since You Were Born!" and then your back page homage to '90s electronica outfit Stardust and their club anthem "Music Sounds Better With You." You guys are reminding me of my club-kid heyday—thanks!

RICHIE NERO, NEW YORK CITY

WALK AWAY, RENÉE

If Kenny Chesney isn't going to perform "You Had Me From Hello" anymore, why doesn't he write another, more suitable, Zellweger-themed song? Like "Down With Love"? Or "The Bachelor"?

MARY WITT, BURBANK, CA

Stop! You had us from ... uh ... to be honest, you never really had us at all.

CONGRATULATIONS TO DONALD WILSON OF CLOVIS, NEW MEXICO, WINNER OF BLENDER'S OCTOBER CROSSWORD CONTEST, WHO SCORED ULTRASONE PROLINE HEADPHONES.

LISTEN UP

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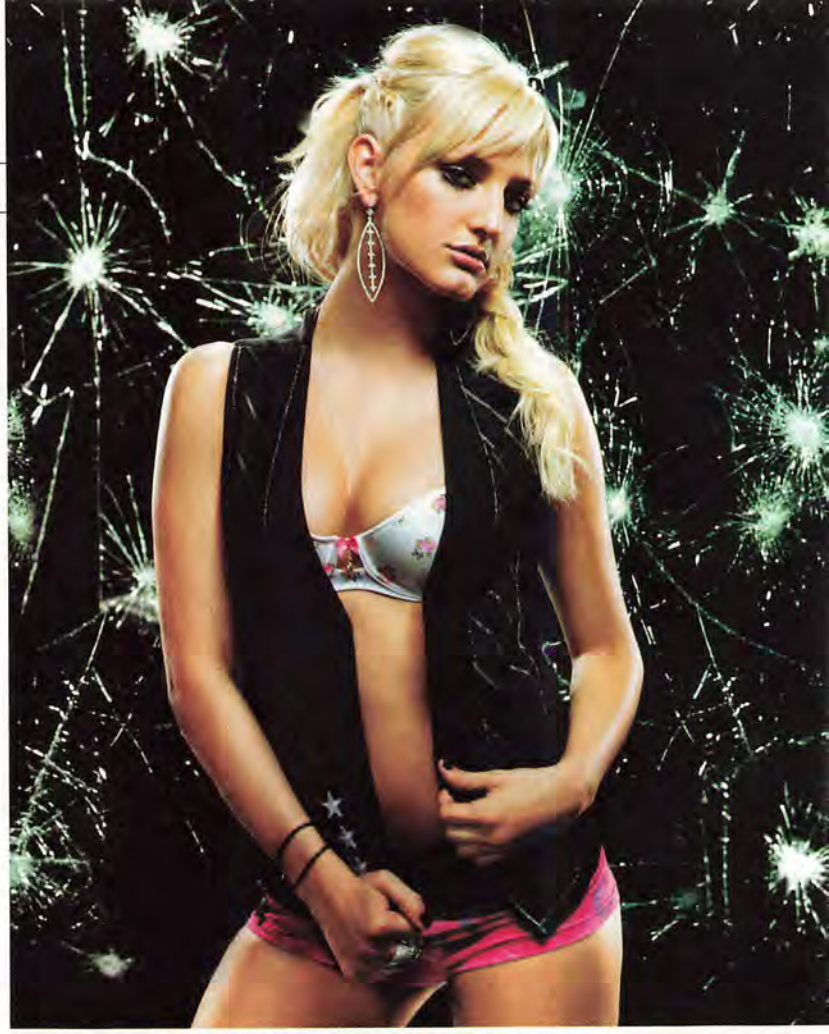

Sleek and effective, Ashlee models the latest in bulletproof-vest technology.

ANTHONY MANDLER

SIXTH NONSENSE

Never have I wanted to be in someone's shoes more than when I read Steve Kandell's account of hanging out with Kenny Chesney on his boat. Dude, I'm in sixth gear right now!

KEVIN STOTLER, CHANDLER, AZ

Ironically, here at *Blender*, we try to stay as far away from Steve Kandell's shoes as possible.

WHERE THERE'S A WILMA ...

I'm not the kind of person to suggest that Wilmer Valderrama spends all his downtime horndogging around attractive female celebrities. But I am the kind of person to point out that not only does he figure heavily in your roundup of "Young Hollywood's It-Blondes," he has also now been featured in two successive *Blender* features (first in your November profile of Bombshell Babies dancer Staci Flood, then in December's piece on Ashlee Simpson). So, in retrospect, I guess that I am the kind of person to suggest that Wilmer Valderrama spends all his downtime horndogging around attractive female celebrities.

AARON MORLEY, LAUDERDALE-BY-THE-SEA, FL

WAR: THIS IS WHAT IT'S GOOD FOR

Re your "Hiphopalypse Now" story: I couldn't be happier that some soldiers are rapping about the problems they faced in Iraq. But given the mess that has been caused fighting Bush's oil-war clusterfuck, I think that qualifies as the thinnest silver lining of all time.

DOUG LAWSON, ROCKFORD, IL

GOOD APPLE

Reading your Fiona Apple feature, I couldn't help feeling that her comment about being "in a really good place now" is what celebrities always say. I'm not saying she's lying—in fact, I hope she's telling the truth. But, just for once, it would be a change to hear someone say, "Yeah, I'm in a totally bad place right now. Drugs, hookers, bestiality: You name it, I'm into it. I'm fucked, basically."

JULIE BEDELL, LOS ANGELES

NEVER MIND THE POTTERS

Re Daniel Radcliffe's statement (in December's My Music), "I was obsessed with punk when I was 12": Wasn't that, like, yesterday?

JULIE RHODES, ARLINGTON, VA →

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I AM CURIOUS (YELLOW)

Congratulations on your Ricky Martin Back Page interview. Who would have thought that he really was living *la vida loca* quite that hard? It was already one of the most entertaining pieces I've read for a long time, even before you got him talking about golden showers. That was just the (yellow-colored) icing on the cake.

EVAN AMARITO, WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA

BANG FOR YOUR BUCK (AND STIPE)

After reading your story about the original lineup of R.E.M. reuniting for the nuptials of one of their guitar techs, can I now assume they are available for weddings and bar mitzvahs? And how much extra would they have to be paid not to play any songs from their last four albums? Also, thank goodness that the search for the Holy Grail has now been taken over by the guy who used to be the drummer for the Damned. Surely it is only a matter of days, if not hours, before it is found.

SARAH STRUBLE, MARIETTA, GA

Snarkiness is not an attractive attribute. Although it is kind of a funny one.

GEEK FILE OPENED

I was reading your "Geek File" on Sebastian Lefebvre, and he said that Simple Plan had never been on a game soundtrack. I don't know if it counts as a soundtrack, but Simple Plan have songs on both *Karaoke Revolution Volume One* and *Volume Two*! Maybe he forgot to mention it because both songs are so easy to sing and they're embarrassed that anyone can get a platinum rating on their song "Addicted."

DENNY LEWALK, CLEVELAND

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

Why didn't you ask Justin Hawkins from the Darkness what happened to that guy with the huge moustache?

JASON ANTON, SAINT LOUIS, MO

Salvador Dalí? He died years ago.

OBVIOUSLY, YOU'RE NOT A GOLFER

Are you planning to publish an issue of *Blender* at any point that doesn't mention the words "the," "big" and "Lebowski"?

ALLIE CARCH, LILLINGTON, NC

Seemingly not.

WHAT WOULD BLENDER DO?

As a Christian, I would like to thank you for the interesting and informed piece about the Megachurch and Team Strike Force. But was it really necessary to picture them making the "devil's sign"?

AMY HUTTON, DEL NORTE, CO

Just be grateful the photograper ran out of film before they started bathing in virgin's blood.

SUPERFAN

BRINGING OUT THE STALKER IN YOU SINCE 2001

Victor Yu and Al Green

Raymond Perez and blink-182

Dave Grohl and Lisa Larson

Gwen Stefani and Nigel Wilde

Shirley Manson and Luis Hernandez

Tamar Anitai and Burt Bacharach

DEAR GOD

Your history of rock and Christianity missed an extremely important event: the birth of Eric Clapton, a.k.a. "God."

MIKE BASCETTA, LIBERTY, MO

Well, they do both have beards ...

WHAT WOULD U2 DO?

Re West Virginia University running a four-part course on 'The Gospel According to U2': Do you figure one of the parts explained how Adam Clayton got to sleep with Naomi Campbell?

MARC NEWKIRK, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Blasphemy!

WHAT A DRAG!

I just want to say that Giant Drag's "YFLMD" (a.k.a. "You Fuck Like My Dad") is now officially my favorite song title after "All My Exes Live in Texas."

BRENDA NEWELL, TROY, MI

DEAD OR ALIVE?

Great Dave Gahan/Dear Superstar piece. Kudos to Victoria De Silverio. I know it's too late now, but I have a question. How the hell is that guy still breathing?

DEB BECKMAN, HOUSTON

Read the piece again and you'll find out that sometimes he isn't.

SOVEREIGN OR SPORTY?

I think you've made a mistake. That wasn't a photograph of Lady Sovereign you ran in your Almost Famous section. That was Sporty Spice!

PETE FISHER, JACKSON HOLE, WY

Actually, it *was* a photograph of Lady Sovereign. But we see what you mean.

R-RATED

R. Kelly's wife wants a divorce? What a surprise! Do you have any idea why?

MEGHAN RIUCCE, CARMEL, CA

Our lawyers inform us that we don't.

"Coheed and Cambria ... and on trombone, Jabberjaw!"

"No, Lady Sovereign, we haven't got your house keys."

SKIN DEEP

"Bad-skinned Canadian showcases genius for the generic." It would be nice if you could, just once, mention Bryan Adams in your magazine without referencing his skin.

CATHERINE SCHARFF, COAL TOWNSHIP, PA

We know for a certified fact that Bryan Adams lights his hand-rolled Cuban cigars with $50 bills and has a solid-gold, 24-carat toilet—and that's not even his "good" one. He can take it.

COHEED AND CONFUSION

Thanks for the great picture of Coheed and Cambria with the hairy stuffed toys. I think I've finally just figured out which is which. Ba-zing!

KARL SAMSEN, BLOOMINGTON, IL

Hey, you just leave the 'Ba-zing'-ing to us!

DOG DAYS

I would buy *Blender* for your "If Pop Stars Were Dogs" feature even if every other page was blank.

KIM WEST, PADUCAH, KY

TALKING TOYS

What is it with you guys and stuffed animals? First you photograph Coheed and Cambria with a bunch of them and then you run another big picture of Talking Heads posed with giant stuffed animals from 1977. And let's not forget your $848 with Big and Rich and your continuous coverage of the Flaming Lips. You guys always make fun of rock stars' sexual proclivities, but are you closet plushies?

MATT GRINELL, KIRKLAND, WA

No, we're totally out plushies.

EGGS-ACTLY!

I'd like to write in support of Sharon Osbourne's "Eggsploitation"—Sharon rocks! I, myself, fondly remember many fun-filled Halloweens spent egging anyone I could. What a blast we had. The more ridiculous the costume, the better. So I say stay strong, Sharon, and fuck apologizing!

GEZA HAY, WEAVERVILLE, CA

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS ...

Send us a photo with your name and address and who your pooch happily resembles. If we print your photo, you'll win a Klipsch iGroove digital music system.

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THE POP STAR

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BLENDER NEXT MONTH

SPECIAL ISSUE!

THE 50 MOST AWESOMELY DEAD ROCK STARS

FROM THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G. TO JOHNNY CASH TO KURT COBAIN, MUSICIANS ARE JUST DYING TO TOP *BLENDER*'S FIRST ANNUAL CORPSETASTIC POWER LIST!

ON SALE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7

Biggie learns about the fire at the Hostess plant.

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CHRISTINA AGUILERA, WHILE DRESSED AS AN EROTIC NURSE, HANDCUFFED HERSELF TO HER FIANCÉ. P.32

01.06

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ... AND PLENTY YOU DON'T!

BURNER

SMALL WONDER

A "MIDGET" STRIPPER IMPREGNATES A PHILANDERING WIFE IN R. KELLY'S "TRAPPED IN THE CLOSET" SERIES

R. Kelly's "Trapped in the Closet" saga has taken an oddball turn. In chapter eleven of the ongoing R&B operetta—included on a new DVD of the same name—it is revealed that one of the principal characters' wives is carrying the baby of a well-endowed "midget," as Kelly refers to him, named Big Man. Though Kelly's open-ended tale of shifting allegiances, violence and infidelity has entered absurdist-comical territory, he insists he is merely exploring universal truths. "It's just this big whirlwind, a circle of drama, of things that really do happen on the earth," Kelly says. "Some people are going to see themselves in these chapters." *NOEL BODDIE*

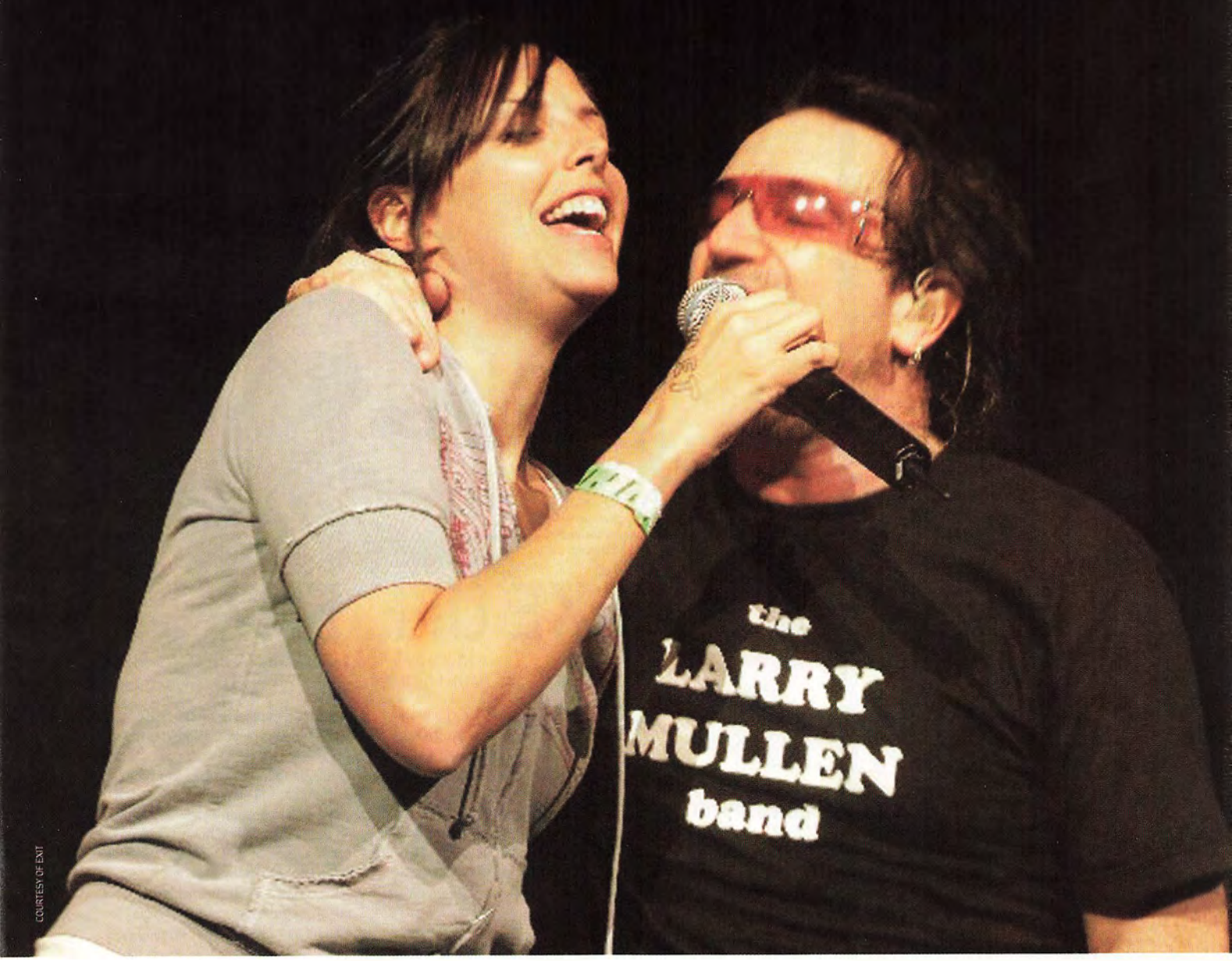
AGUILERA: DENISE TRUSCELLO/WIREIMAGE.COM

_"Go to sleep, my little man/Don't you weep, my little man."

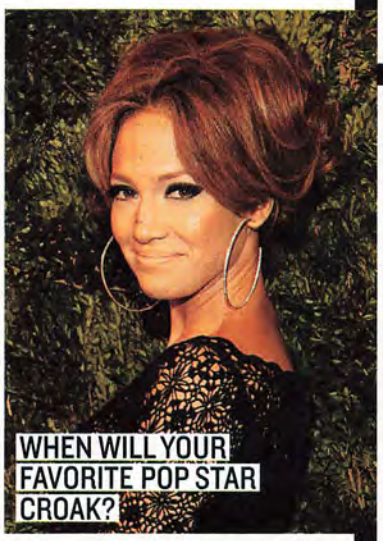
YOU, TOO!

BONO PULLS UNKNOWN GIRL BAND ONSTAGE TO PLAY U2 SONG

A YOUNG ROCK band called Exit got a once-in-a-lifetime audition when U2 pulled them onstage at an L.A. concert and handed over their instruments. "We were up front with a sign that said THE GIRLS PLAY ROCK AND ROLL," guitarist Courtney Lavender, 24, tells *Blender*. "Bono saw it and brought us up to prove it." The L.A. foursome, who formed in high school and have played local small clubs since, covered U2's "Out of Control," garnering Bono's praise ("They're good!"), a standing ovation and instant major-label attention from executives in the crowd: Atlantic, Columbia and Sony have reportedly contacted them. The story has prompted some to suspect a setup, but Lavender laughingly denies it: "That's flattering, actually! If we sucked, they wouldn't be saying that." *NOEL BODDIE*



COURTESY OF EXIT



WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR CROAK?

#25 JENNIFER LOPEZ

BIRTH DATE	JULY 24, 1969
CURRENT AGE	36
DEATH CALCULATOR STARTS AT AGE	77

CATEGORY	YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED
Personal turmoil: Divorced twice, broke off engagement, wrecked Marc Anthony's marriage, sued by ex-hubby she hired and then fired from her restaurant.	- 5
Oddsbeater: Beat bookies' 3–1 odds marriage No. 3 would end before 2006.	+ 1
Old flame support: Diddy says J. Lo is still his "girl for life."	+ 1
Hypertension: Latin women at high risk, genetically.	- 3
Strong family ties: Very close to kindergarten-teacher mom, computer-wiz dad.	+ 5
Aerobic lifestyle: Lifelong award-winning stage and film dancer.	+ 3
Personal trainer: He manages her fitness routine and healthy diet.	+ 2
Sense of humor: "I could serve coffee using my rear as a ledge."	+ 1
Neurobic: Creative fashion designer, entrepreneur, trendsetter.	+ 2
Traditional values: Marries 3x rather than sleep around, complains that media falsely "equates sexy with promiscuous."	+ 1
High pressure: In 2005, three films, a record, a fashion show, other business projects.	- 3
Scrutiny: Fishbowl life causes stress.	- 2
ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY	80
PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH	2049

Gerontologist **Dr. Demko**: "Jennifer needs to capitalize on life-enhancing traits (family ties, work ethic, creativity) while monitoring age- and ethnicity-related health risks. Realistic goal-setting can create downtime to relax, recharge and manage stress."

NEWS ROUNDUP

COLDPLAY singer Chris Martin has admitted his lyric-writing skills need improving and has pledged to act now. "They're about to get brilliant," he assured.

The white suit worn by JOHN LENNON on the album cover of the Beatles' album *Abbey Road* has sold at auction for $118,000.

A new book has named the man who shot 50 CENT nine times in May 2000. *Queens Reigns Supreme* by Ethan Brown claims that Darryl "Hommo" Baum fired the shots and was killed three weeks later.

WORD!

"THIS FROZEN EMBRYO THAT IS IN NEW YORK IS MY CHILD WAITING TO BE BROUGHT TO LIFE"

CELINE DION, ON BECOMING IN-VITRO PREGNANT

"Man, watching *Supersize Me* sure got my stomach rumbling."

"I'll have one order of fries and another of 'Kiss my foot, beeyotch!'"

Shortly afterwards, Ashlee was tasered by Ronald McDonald.

TAKE OFF, EH?

ASHLEE SIMPSON GOES LA-LA AT TORONTO FAST-FOOD JOINT

IN TORONTO TO promote her No. 1 album *I Am Me*, Ashlee Simpson gave a different kind of performance at a McDonald's. Captured on a customer's cellphone, the singer was filmed slurring her words and cursing at a fan and a franchise employee.

Trouble erupted when an admirer asked for a photo with the just-turned-21 singer. "No," replied Simpson, "you would not kiss my foot, so, fuck you!" When an employee standing near the deep fryer threatened to call the manager, Simpson threw her leg onto the counter and pleaded, "Oh please, bring the manager."

When the employee asked her to get down, the encroaching singer said, "Bitch, stop talking to me. I'm nice. I promise you your manager will be nice to me … I bet you five million dollars!" After Simpson's male companion pulled her off the counter, she staggered out the door, commenting, "Things are going wrong up here."

Questioned about the incident, Simpson's spokesperson said, "A girl should be allowed to buy a burger in peace." *TONY MCMENAMIN*

LOPEZ: DENISE TRUSCELLO/WIREIMAGE.COM; SIMPSON: SPLASH NEWS; DION: DENISE TRUSCELLO/WIREIMAGE.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

 "But now I am jaded/You're out of luck/I'm rolling down the stairs/Too drunk to fuck."

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ALMOST FAMOUS

LOLA

A 24-YEAR-OLD PARISIAN SINGS ABOUT HAVING SEX WITH STRANGERS

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID FERRUA

When Lola Zaidline-Delon's debut single, "No Strings," a sultry slow jam exalting the joys of casual sex, started getting heavy radio play, the French-born singer was jubilant. That is, until the deluge of listener complaints came flooding in.

"People called stations saying my song was tearing at the fabric of moral decency!" she sighs in disbelief over America's reaction to her chorus "I don't even know you/And I don't care/Come on, baby, let's do it right here."

The 24-year-old, however, is far from contrite. "If you feel something, you have to let it out. I don't advocate disrespecting yourself and putting yourself in perilous positions. I just believe in being free."

And is Lola, well, "free" very often?

"Ha ha," she laughs. "Well, occasionally, maybe. I get off more on feeling special and worshipped. If I'm not being made to feel like a goddess, then I won't engage in anything."

Born and raised in Paris by her screenwriter father and schoolteacher mother, Lola says she was a "wild child" (though she won't explain precisely how) who by the age of 20 traded France for Brooklyn.

"I began to feel the French mentality stifling," she says. "In New York, I feel a sense of solidarity, because most of the population doesn't come from here. We have to hustle together in order to overcome, and I'm drawn to that."

For her debut, *Take It Like I Give It*, a sassy mix of libidinous R&B and traditional soul, the singer took inspiration from Kanye West, Prince and Alicia Keys. And yes, there are more, as she puts it, "naughty songs" on the album.

But it's not all about sex, she insists. "At this stage, I want to invite people in, not scare them away."

The follow-through is exquisitely French: "There is plenty of time for that later."

OUT NOW *TAKE IT LIKE I GIVE IT* SOBE/WARNER BROS.

ALL ABOUT ME!

FAVORITE SONG
"Mind Playin' Tricks on Me," by the Geto Boys

FAMOUS CRUSH
James Gandolfini, because he's just a sexy man.

TYPICAL NIGHT OF DEBAUCHERY INCLUDES
Board games and hot cocoa.

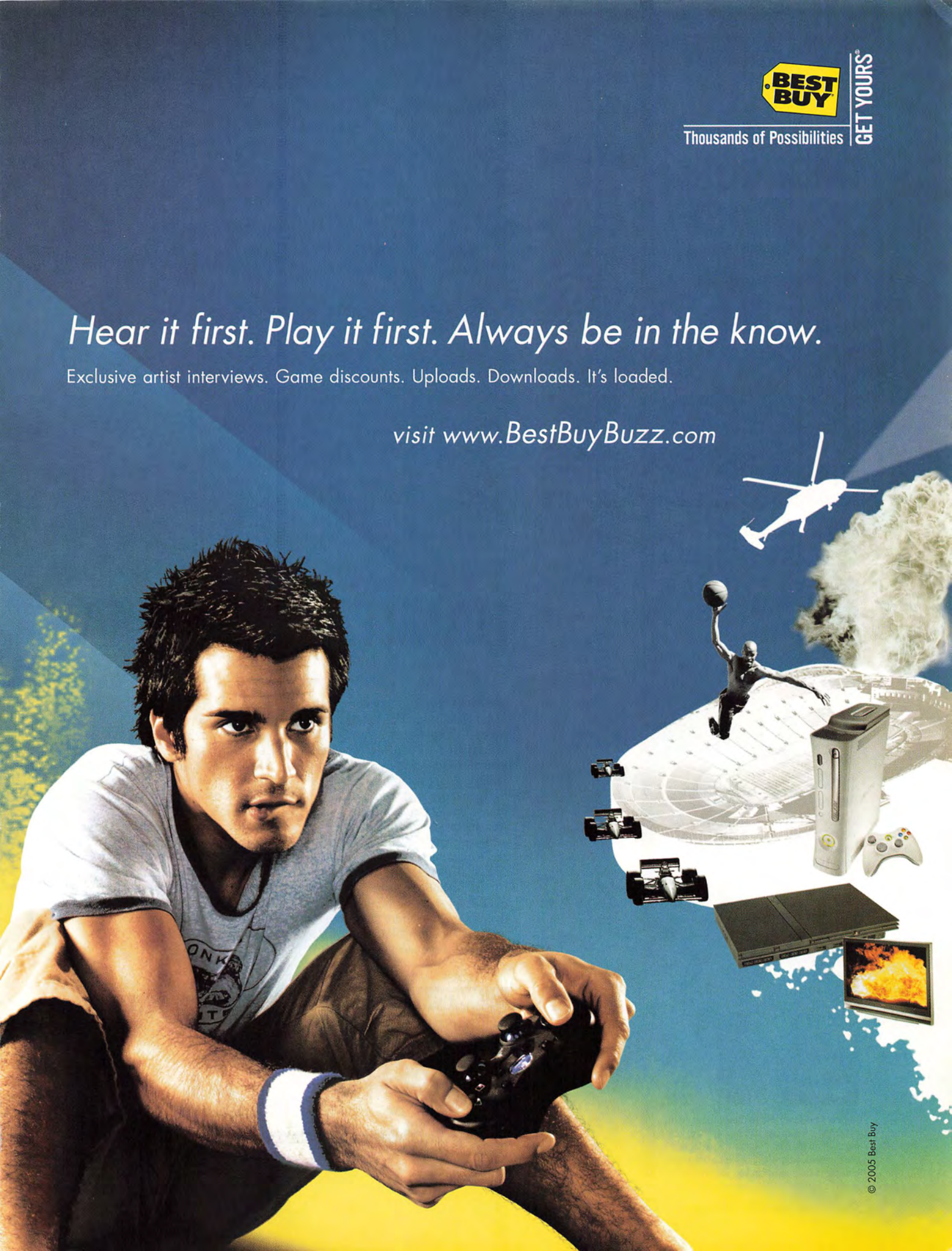
MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND
I don't like air conditioning; I prefer to have choirboys gently blow on the nape of my neck at all times.

"IF I'M NOT BEING MADE TO FEEL LIKE A GODDESS, THEN I WON'T ENGAGE."

DRESS BY **J. MASKREY** SANDALS BY **CESARE PACIOTTI**
JEWELRY BY **CAROLINA BARBIERI**

STYLIST: ROMINA HERRERA MALATESTA FOR FILOMENO; HAIR: LEONARDO MANETTI WITH BUMBLE + BUMBLE.; MAKEUP: GINA CROZIER AT FILOMENO

 "She's got legs, she knows how to use them/She never begs, she knows how to choose them."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IN DA DOGHOUSE!

AFTER A WEEK OF SOLO CLUB-HOPPING, KEVIN FEDERLINE IS DEALT A SOBERING REALITY CHECK: HIS HIP-HOP SONG GETS TRASHED AND HIS CREDIT CARD IS DECLINED

With wife Britney Spears in Louisiana, Federline's clubbing kicks off at L.A.'s Mood and later that week at Element, where he allegedly dirty-dances with Ashlee Simpson.

While rumors of Spears's discontent grow and his partying continues, the budding rapper's Internet-leaked song "Y'all Ain't Ready" received brutal bashings on blogs.

Hoping to recover with a Blockbuster night, his credit card appears to be declined, lending irony to his lyric: "I know y'all wish you was in my position, 'cause I keep getting in situations that you wish you was in."

NEWS ROUNDUP

SEX PISTOLS guitarist Steve Jones has called modern punk bands like Simple Plan and Good Charlotte "knuckleheads," saying, "It's a shame that they're disguising it under the word 'punk.'"

COURTNEY LOVE has been sued by her lawyers. Hendricks & Lewis claim the troubled singer owes over $340,000 for work in securing Kurt Cobain's publishing rights.

VAN HALEN have denied rumors they will follow INXS in searching for a new lead singer on the reality TV show *Rock Star*.

Trust us on this: It's Janet Jackson.

DAMITA JO MAMA

FORMER IN-LAW ALLEGES THAT JANET JACKSON IS KEEPING MUM ABOUT A SECRET DAUGHTER

THE JACKSON FAMILY is embroiled in another kiddie scandal, but this time, Michael isn't to blame. Sister Janet is alleged to have a daughter, who has been raised in secret by the singing family's eldest sibling, Rebbie.

Speaking on New York City radio station Hot 97 October 21, Jackson's former brother-in-law Young DeBarge, who was on air to promote his debut record, claimed that Jackson gave birth to a girl named Renée 18 years ago.

The Super Bowl flasher was married to R&B singer James DeBarge for three months in 1984 before their marriage ended in annulment. If DeBarge's claims are true, the teenager would have to have been born in 1987, three years after the couple split.

The 39-year-old Jackson immediately refuted the claim, saying, "I do not have a child and all allegations saying so are false." Neither the child in question nor the alleged father has come public on the matter.

What cannot be denied is the existence of a video clip making the rounds on the Internet, showing Jackson sunbathing naked. Alternating between lying on her stomach and her back, the denuded superstar appears far more svelte than in recent photos, taken while jogging in a tracksuit.

TONY MCMENAMIN

WORD!

"TWAT."

SHARON OSBOURNE ON BONO

OVERSIMPLIFIER

COMPLICATED IDEAS REDUCED TO AN UNDEMANDING DIAGRAM

MIDLIFE COMEBACKS

FEDERLINE: X17AGENCY.COM; JACKSON: FAME PICTURES; VANILLA ICE: MICHAEL CAULFIELD/WIREIMAGE.COM; MADONNA: TONY BARSON/WIREIMAGE.COM; TRAVOLTA: CORBIS SYGMA

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CHAMONE

MICHAEL JACKSON WOWS HIS FANS BY CLIMBING ONTO HIS CAR

1

In London to record the Hurricane Katrina benefit song "From the Bottom of My Heart," the King of Pop arrives at a studio where he is met by a crazed throng of fans.

2

As the crowd nears hysteria, Jackson, in a repeat move of his pre-trial SUV-climbing antics, steps up onto the roof of his car.

3

Appearing alone, without his three head-blanketed children, he maneuvers over the car as the screaming crowd snaps pictures.

NEWS ROUNDUP

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE has defended ex-girlfriend Britney Spears against press intrusions. "Leave the girl alone, let her have the baby!" he said.

SHAKIRA has confessed to being "shy" about revealing her body in her videos. "My videos represent the artist in me very well, but not the kind of woman I am," she said.

JOHNNY CASH's daughter Kathy Cash has attacked the new movie *Walk the Line* for its portrayal of her mother, the country legend's first wife, Vivian Liberto Distin. "She loved his career and was proud of him until he started taking drugs and stopped coming home," she said.

WORD!

"I THINK SHE OUGHTTA BE SLAPPED SILLY."

TED NUGENT ON SHARON OSBOURNE

The Hotel Max: We're guessing the robes are flannel.

Smells like ... it's time for room service.

SUITE, DUDE!

SEATTLE HOTEL INVOKES TEEN SPIRIT WITH GRUNGE MAKEOVER

LOCATED IN THE birthplace of grunge, the newly opened Hotel Max pays tribute to the slacker genre's flannel- and heroin-loving stars.

Formerly known as the Vance Hotel, the 163-room complex on downtown Seattle's Stewart Street was given an extreme makeover and re-opened on October 15. Former Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic was on hand at the opening ceremony to cut the ribbon.

Claiming to be the rainy city's most "artistic" hotel, the Max exhibits works by local artists and photographers. On the hotel's coveted fifth floor, life-size photos of grunge idols such as Nirvana, Courtney Love and Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, taken by Seattle-based snapper Charles Petersen, adorn guestroom doors. Kurt Cobain welcomes you into room 514, while a poster of Love is plastered next door on room 515.

"People come to Seattle and they want to learn about grunge," said Hotel Max designer Denise Corso. "Rock stars here are connected to the photographers, so the cross-pollination was seen as a good idea. Krist agreed it was a great concept and monument to the whole grunge movement." *TONY MCMENAMIN*

JACKSON: RAMEYPIX.COM; HOTEL: COURTESY HOTEL MAX; NUGENT: JASON MERRITT/FILMMAGIC.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

ALMOST FAMOUS

WE ARE SCIENTISTS

YODA DOLL–MOLESTING, SALINGER-LOVING DANCE ROCKERS

BY LAUREN HARRIS
PHOTOGRAPH BY F. SCOTT SCHAFER

"PEOPLE GO BERSERK for certain songs," says Keith Murray, 28, singer and guitarist of the dance-rock trio We Are Scientists, "which is amazing because we keep forgetting we're a legitimate band and not just three idiots in a van."

The group just completed a tour with Hot Hot Heat, so lately they've put their other interests—writing a mock advice column for their website and photographing themselves acting out scenes with a Yoda doll—on hold.

The three members hail from different cities (Murray is from Miami; drummer Michael Tapper, 27, Dallas; and bassist Chris Cain, 28, Ogden, Utah) and met while attending California's Pomona College five years ago. Figuring that joining a band would be a good way to make friends, Murray approached Tapper. "But Michael refused my advances," he laughs. They eventually worked things out and moved first to Los Angeles and then to New York, enduring three years of obscurity and "more than a few sparsely attended shows."

After peddling a five-song demo, *The Wolf's Hour*, and playing a buzzy set at South by Southwest last year, they attracted the attention of major labels. Their full-length debut, *With Love and Squalor*—named for a J.D. Salinger short story—features the band's new wave alchemy of jittery guitars and anxious, slightly nasal vocals ruminating on guilt-free hookups and late-night malaise.

Turns out a clever title isn't all the band cribbed from the famously reclusive author. "Salinger definitely affected my writing style," says Murray. "Conversational, straightforward sentences, but every one counts."

OUT NOW ***WITH LOVE AND SQUALOR*** *VIRGIN*

ALL ABOUT US!

FIRST ALBUM EVER BOUGHT
Faith by George Michael (Cain)

TYPICAL NIGHT OF DEBAUCHERY
Fuckin' and fightin' and usin' swears. (Tapper)

WON'T TOUR WITHOUT
Peanut butter and jelly. (Murray)

OBSESSIONS
The O.C. (Murray)

We Are Scientists, left to right: Chris Cain, Keith Murray, Zoe, Michael Tapper.

"WE KEEP FORGETTING WE'RE NOT JUST THREE IDIOTS IN A VAN."

STYLIST: LYANI POWERS; GROOMING: AMENEH FOR WARREN TRICOMI

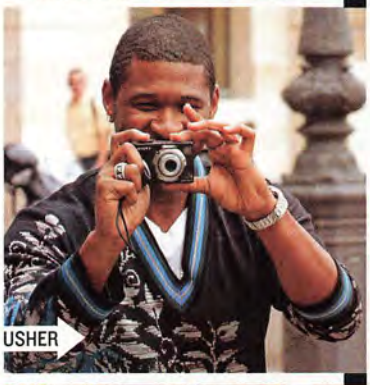
ALL PROPS BY MANHATTAN MEDICAL

POP STAR MUST-HAVE

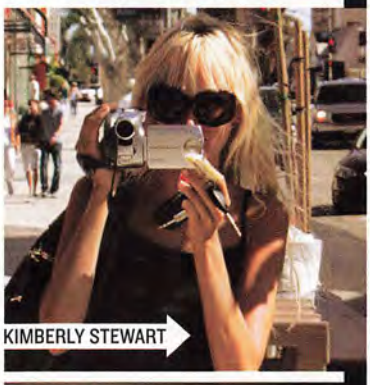
ROLE REVERSALS

PAPARAZZI-HUNTED POP STARS TURN THE TABLES BY PHOTOGRAPHING THEIR STALKING SNAPPERS

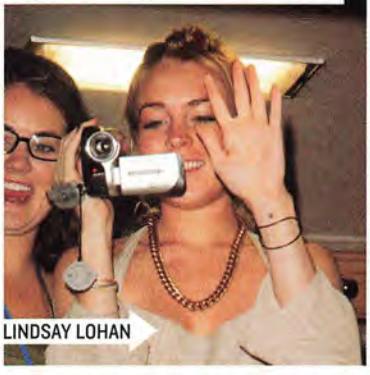
PARIS HILTON



USHER



KIMBERLY STEWART



LINDSAY LOHAN

NEWS ROUNDUP

Beach Boy Mike Love is suing BRIAN WILSON and a U.K. tabloid for promoting Wilson's 2004 *Smile* album in a way that "shamelessly misappropriated Mike Love's songs, likeness and the Beach Boys trademark, as well as the *Smile* album itself." Love's lawyer said the lawsuit was not personally motivated: "Mike has a lot of affection for Brian."

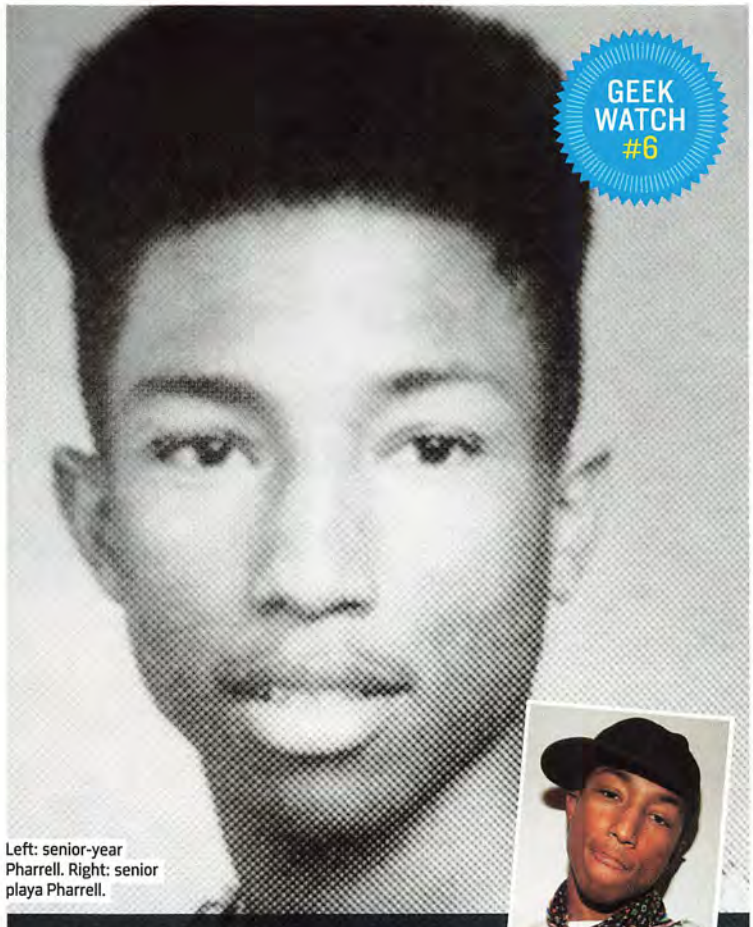
Already a purveyor of clothing and porn, SNOOP DOGG is moving into the foot-long hot dog business with Snoop Doggs, a new food product out in January. "Snoop takes advantage of everything," said Snoop's brother and business manager, Bing Worthington. "This rap money isn't long. Just ask MC Hammer."

MELISSA ETHERIDGE has said she used medicinal marijuana to help ease the pain from chemotherapy while being treated for breast cancer last year.

WORD!

"MOST PRIESTS ARE GAY."

MADONNA



GEEK WATCH #6

Left: senior-year Pharrell. Right: senior playa Pharrell.

FADED!

BEFORE HE WAS AN ARBITER OF COOL, PHARRELL WILLIAMS TOOK CUES FROM KID 'N PLAY

AS ONE HALF of production team the Neptunes, Pharrell Williams owns up to myriad musical inspirations. But as his 1991 yearbook photo proves, the 18-year-old future producer and solo artist bowed down to just one master in tonsorial matters: Kid of Kid 'N Play. Sporting a very tall fade, the senior at Princess Anne High School in Virginia Beach, Virginia, was a veritable doppelganger for the wholesome *House Party* actor. *NOEL BODDIE*

WEIRD BAND ALERT

ROMAK & THE SPACE PIRATES

LOS ANGELES "ELECTRO JAZZ PUNK" QUARTET WITH A SQUID FETISH

SPACE PIRATES?

Yes, but not the intergalactic or seafaring kind. "It refers to one who takes up space," says frontman Thomas Krystich (a.k.a. RoMak), 18, who performs wearing a steel squid mask. "We're all space pirates."

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SQUID OBSESSION?

They're working on a concept album about a starry-eyed squid who moves to L.A. seeking fame but ultimately fails, returns to the ocean and drowns.

Space Pirates: "Gaaarggh!"

KIND OF A DOWNER. ARE THE LIVE SHOWS ANY FUN?

A blast, apparently. Each night, "a volunteer" from the audience drinks a blended concoction of the band's MySpace hate mail and "other disgusting substances" in return for a free T-shirt. *ROBERT ERRERA*

HILTON: FERNANDO SALAS/X17AGENCY.COM; USHER: BAUER-GRIFFIN.COM; STEWART: FAME PIX; LOHAN: LUIS GUERRA/RAMEY PIX.COM; YEARBOOK: COURTESY PRINCESS ANNE HIGH SCHOOL/ZUMA PRESS; PHARRELL INSET: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM; ROMAK: COURTESY ROMAK & THE SPACE PIRATES; MADONNA: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

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Mike Shinoda: totally satisfied with new beard purchase.

DO YOU ROCK?

MIKE SHINODA

DOES THE LINKIN PARK MC AND MOONLIGHTING FORT MINOR FRONTMAN INDEED ... ROCK?

Ever trash a hotel room?
In London, I sat down on this glass table really hard and smashed it. We didn't want to get busted, so we disassembled it and hid the pieces all over the room.

Best rumor about yourself?
That I'm married to a porn star.

Biggest celeb's home you've ever gotten drunk in?
Diddy.

Biggest celeb in your cellphone?
Bono.

Ever wrecked a car?
I stayed up two nights straight and tried to go on a road trip. I fell asleep at the wheel going 80 m.p.h., flew across four lanes of traffic without hitting anybody, and totaled my car.

Ever harbor a fugitive of the law?
Yes, Jacoby Shaddix from Papa Roach. The police were looking for him because he was accused of inciting a riot.

Stupidest thing you've ever eaten?
Camel.

Worst tour horror story?
We were at a bar in Tokyo and I got really drunk, wandered outside into the alley, sat down and passed out on the ground. My friends left without me and at 4 A.M. the bar owner found me and woke me up.

Can you vomit on command?
Yes. *DAVE HILL*

VERDICT

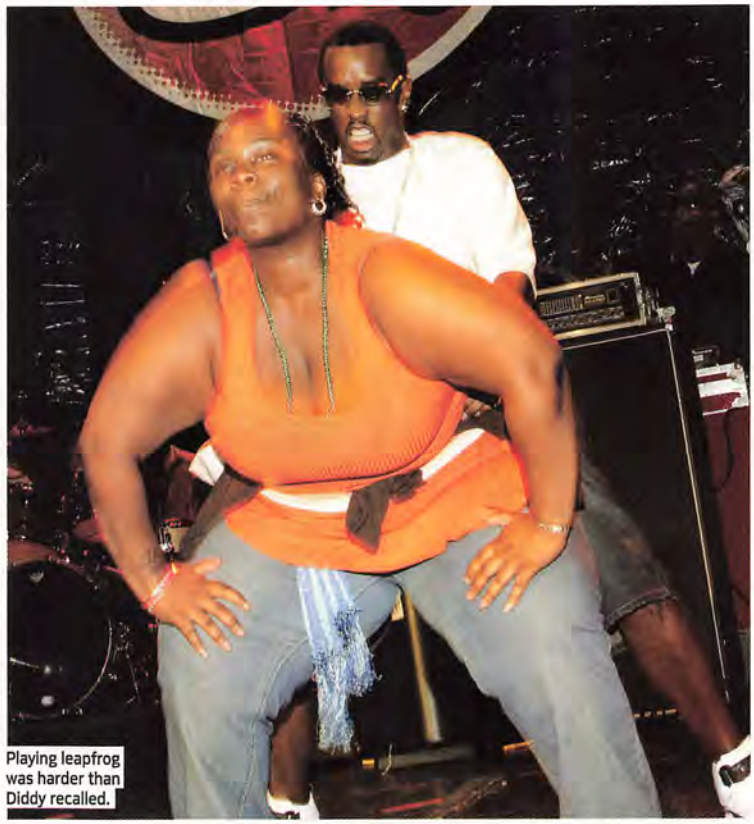
BONO? CAMEL? PASSING OUT IN AN ALLEY? DOES MIKE SHINODA ROCK? SIGNS POINT TO HELL YEAH!!!

FORT MINOR'S *THE RISING TIED* IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE GAME was arrested at a mall in Greensboro, North Carolina, after allegedly refusing a request by mall security to leave and to remove his Halloween mask. When his entourage surrounded officers in what they viewed as a threatening manner, the rapper was taken into custody. "I got arrested for signing autographs," he responded.

Justin Hawkins of THE DARKNESS purchased a leaked pre-official release copy of his band's new album over eBay for $608 and plans to find the guilty party through the disc's ID code. "That person is going to go down," he said.



Playing leapfrog was harder than Diddy recalled.

NO HE DIDDY'NT!

A GENEROUSLY SIZED ELEPHANT MAN FAN IS PICKED FROM THE CROWD, GETS HUMPED FROM BEHIND BY DIDDY

DANCEHALL KING ELEPHANT Man got more than he bargained for when he summoned "big fat ladies" onstage during Hot 97's On Da Reggae Tip Live show in New York last fall.

Answering the call was an exceedingly voluptuous fan, who was hauled through the crowd and onto the stage by Elephant Man and fellow performer Diddy, who then grabbed her waist from behind and faux-humped her. "When I lift up that big giant woman, the crowd was like, 'Oh, no he didn't!'," said Elephant Man. *TONY MCMENAMIN*

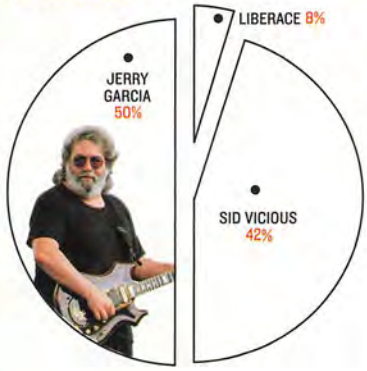
WORD!

"I WOULD BE A THERAPIST IF I WEREN'T AN ENTERTAINER."
JESSICA SIMPSON

BLENDER'S BURNING QUESTION

WHICH DEAD ARTIST SHOULD BE RESURRECTED FOR A DUETS ALBUM?

SURVEY SAYS



READER WISDOM

"GARCIA! PEOPLE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT HE'S MORE THAN AN ICE CREAM."

MATTHEW MCCARTHY, PAINTED POST, NY

Log on to Blender.com for March's "BURNING QUESTION." One deserving reader will have his or her comment published in the next issue and win this BLACKBERRY 7105t.

SHINODA: AMY GRAVES/WIREIMAGE.COM; DIDDY: JOHN RICARD/FILMMAGIC.COM; GARCIA: SCOTT WEINER/RETNA LTD.; SIMPSON: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

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DIRRTY NURSE

XTINA AND HER FIANCÉ HONOR THE MEDICAL PROFESSION IN COSTUME

Christina Aguilera and her fiancé, music executive Jordan Bratman, celebrate Halloween at Nobu in Las Vegas.

Dressed up as an erotic nurse and a doctor in O.R. scrubs, the spirited pair role-play with fake medical instruments.

After checking their vital signs, the pair handcuff themselves to each other and disappear into the party.

NEWS ROUNDUP

R. KELLY is suing Jay-Z again. This time the troubled R&B singer is accusing his former tourmate of rewarding the man who pepper-sprayed him at their concert in New York last year with a job at Def Jam Records.

RICKY MARTIN has explained he took a break from the music business because the fame was making him unhappy. "I was onstage and I was just so angry," he said.

200 teenagers from anti-smoking group Reality Check have written to LENNY KRAVITZ attacking his decision to play the 50th birthday party for Marlboro cigarettes giant Philip Morris. "Don't you think it's important to take a stand to protect other people's health from cigarettes?" they asked.

WORD!

"I WILL MURDER HER."

T.A.T.U.'S LENA KATINA ON U.K. SINGER CHARLOTTE CHURCH, WHO CALLED THE RUSSIAN DUO "RUBBISH"

The Shins' James Mercer: "NPR freakin' rocks!"

IN THE STUDIO

"IT'S KINDA MOTOWN"

THE SHINS GO OLD-SCHOOL FOR THEIR FIRST POST-PORTMAN RELEASE

"I ALWAYS WORRY about disappointing people," says Shins frontman James Mercer. "It's one of my strongest personality traits."

For seven of the last eight years, Mercer and his band of indie-pop underdogs never had a whole lot of people to disappoint. But then came the sleeper hit *Garden State*—with Natalie Portman's proclamation that the Shins "will change your life"—and suddenly the quartet had a much higher profile. So for their third album, which they've been recording in the basement of Mercer's Portland home, the pressure is on.

They seem, however, to be taking the added stress in stride. "We just hang out, drink beer and listen to records," Mercer says. "Being at home, we also have the freedom to do more experimenting: If I'm in bed at 3 A.M. and have an idea, I can just go downstairs, plug in the amp and play. Of course, I never do—the neighbors would get mad."

There's no album title yet, but Mercer says they're kicking ideas around. "We're thinking of calling it *Wincing the Night Away*, because sometimes when I'm lying awake in bed I think of all the stupid things I did that day and just start wincing."

None of the songs have names either, but the first single has already been chosen. "It sounds kinda Motown," Mercer says. "It's about revenge—a bittersweet love song."

Yet despite all the nocturnal fretting and retribution fantasies, the band haven't lost their quirky sense of humor. "We just played in Vegas, where we all dressed up like nuns," Mercer says. "[Keyboardist] Marty [Crandall] was pretending to fellate [bassist] Dave [Hernandez], with the nun costume on and everything. Some people didn't find it very funny." *JOSH EELLS*

ALL ABOUT OUR RECORD

ARTIST The Shins
PRODUCER Phil Ek, the Shins
STUDIO Home studio, Portland, Oregon
LAST ALBUM *Chutes Too Narrow*, 2003
NEW ALBUM Untitled, due summer 2006

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

Latin hearthrob ENRIQUE IGLESIAS is now working with Max Martin in Sweden and Ron Fair at Record Plant Studios in Hollywood on the follow-up to 2003's *7*.

Soviet songstress REGINA SPEKTOR is at work on her second major-label CD with producer David Kahne at New York's New York Noise Studios, due spring 2006.

Jersey emo sextet THURSDAY are working with Dave Fridmann in Fredonia, New York, on the band's follow-up to 2003's *War All the Time*, due spring 2006.

Brit rockers TRAVIS are working on their first record in three years, the follow-up to *12 Memories*, with Nigel Godrich at his London studio, called Hospital.

AGUILERA: DENISE TRUSCELLO/WIREIMAGE.COM; MERCER: RAY GORDON; KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC.COM; ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

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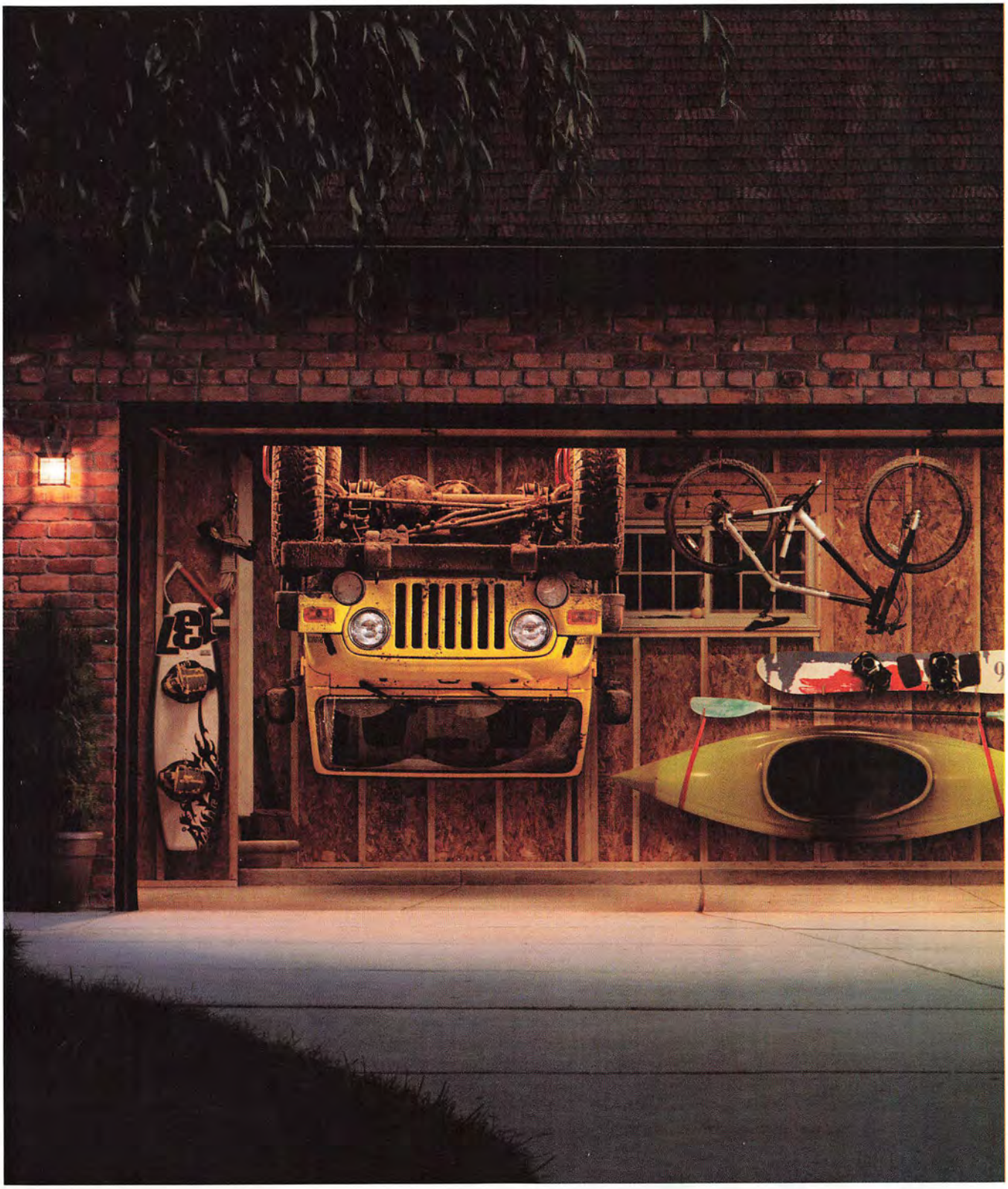

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Jack White: "I won the medal in, uh, 'Nam."

COKED UP

JACK WHITE CHANGES HIS MIND ON SELLING OUT, HIS NAME TO "THREE QUID"

WHITE STRIPE JACK White has joined the ranks of Christina Aguilera, Mya and Jennifer Lopez as the latest pop star to endorse Coca-Cola.

White, who has long refused to license any of his band's songs for advertising purposes, recently wrote a jingle for an as-yet untelevised commercial.

"I've been offered the opportunity to write a song, to write something particular along one theme of love in a worldwide form," said White, a self-confessed six-can-a-day fan of the soft drink.

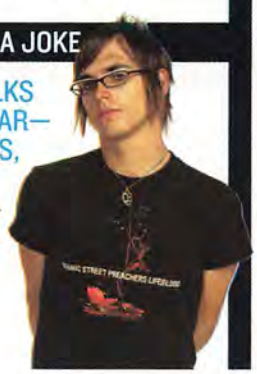
Meanwhile, during the first night of his band's fall tour in London at the Hammersmith Apollo, the increasingly eccentrically dressed singer announced he would like to be known as "Three Quid" for the duration of the tour.

White offered no explanation as to why and could not be reached for further comment. *LAUREN HARRIS*

TELL US A JOKE

"GUY WALKS INTO A BAR—AND SAYS, 'OUCH!'"

MIKEY WAY
MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE



NEWS ROUNDUP

Stand-up comic MARGARET CHO has labelled Gwen Stefani's Asian backup singers the Harajuku Girls a "minstrel show" that reinforces racial stereotypes of Asian women.

The Who singer ROGER DALTREY has lambasted Babyshambles singer Pete Doherty for his drug use. "It's a waste of a life really, because he's got talent," he said.

FRED DURST has dashed rumors that limpbizkit are splitting up, saying that two further albums are planned. "Musically, I don't think we could be in a better place than we are right now," he said.

WORD!

"I OCCASIONALLY BORROW POT FROM MY KIDS."
KEITH RICHARDS

LIFE AFTER ROCK

Then: wacked-out Heartbreaker.

Now: clued-in dealmaker.

WALTER LURE

THEN

GUITARIST/BACKUP SINGER, THE HEARTBREAKERS 1975–1978

"I USED TO run into Johnny [Thunders] at all the same gigs in the late '60's. He had this rat's-nest hairdo, wore the latest English clothes. Impossible to miss. A few years later, I wander into the Mercer Arts Center and he's up onstage with the New York Dolls. When they split up, Johnny asked me if I wanted to audition for a new thing he was putting together. I played my first Heartbreakers show at CBGB's Summer Festival, July 4, 1975."

NOW

MANAGER OF OPERATIONS AND TRADE SETTLEMENT FOR A "LARGE INVESTMENT FIRM," NEW JERSEY

"AFTER THE HEARTBREAKERS' rise and quick descent into hell, I was nearing broke and in bad health. My father, a banker, knew a guy who consulted on corporate acquisitions. In 1981, I interned for him and eventually jumped to a brokerage firm, rising from clerk to VP of operations overseeing about 100 people. I now concentrate in proxies and class-action litigations. It's challenging work, but also a pretty good living that lets me save a little." *AS TOLD TO ANDREW BAKER*

STREET CRED

THE ARCADE FIRE PLAY FOR SPARE CHANGE IN NYC

NIGHT-OWL INDIE-ROCK fans got a pleasant surprise in November when members of Montreal band the Arcade Fire played an impromptu gig at New York City's Union Square Park.

Shortly after 2 A.M., Win Butler, his brother Will and Régine Chassagne played several covers, including the Cure's "Boys Don't Cry" and the Pixies' "Wave of Mutilation." They closed the busking session with one of their own songs, "Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels)," off last year's sleeper hit *Funeral*.

According to the band's publicist, the band were in town for a friend's wedding and were staying in a hotel not far from Union Square. "They thought it would be fun," he explained. "It was very spur-of-the-moment."

The Arcade Fire discover the public to be "cheap bastards."

One lucky local who stumbled upon the scene wrote about it on a blog. "Holy fucking shit," posted Natalie Kaufman. "New York is magic." *JOSH EELLS*

WHITE: JIMMY JAMES/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA LTD.; LURE, LEFT: MARCIA RESNICK/RETNA LTD.; LURE, RIGHT: COURTESY WALTER LURE; ARCADE FIRE: NATALIE KAUFMAN; WAY: B.J. PAPAS/RETNA LTD.; RICHARDS: MICHAEL IOCCISANO/FILMMAGIC.COM/ILLUSTRATION BY GARY FRENCH

BILLY DUFFY AND JERRY CANTRELL

JAMES MERCER OF THE SHINS

THE LIKE

GUEST LIST

ROCK & ROLL HOLLYWOOD

On October 27, *Blender* and Cadillac rolled out the red carpet for music and film royalty at a posh private Hollywood Hills mansion to celebrate *Blender*'s inaugural **"Rock & Roll Hollywood"** November issue.

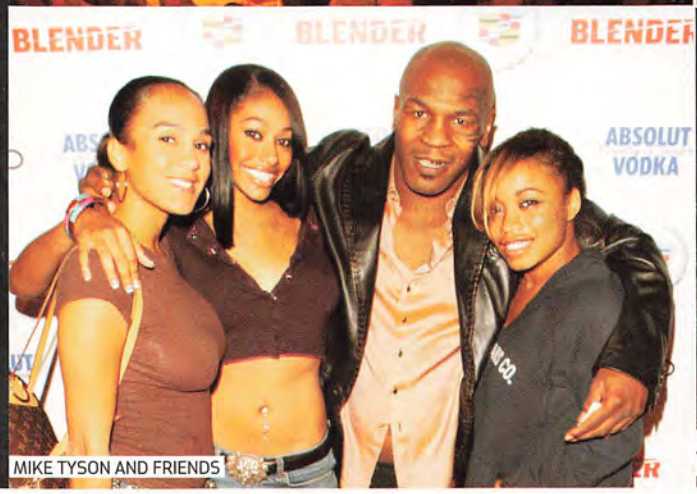
Sponsored by **Cadillac**, **Aldo**, **Absolut Vodka** and **St. Pauli Girl Beer**, *Blender*'s "Rock & Roll Hollywood" bash combined entertainment's two most decadent lifestyles into one memorable event. Over 500 celebrities, entertainment insiders and tastemakers including **Paris & Nicky Hilton**, **Nicole Ritchie**, **Christian Slater**, **Scott Weiland**, **Mike Tyson**, **Danny Masterson**, **Serena Williams**, **JC Chasez** and **Bai Ling** enjoyed luxury suites, specialty cocktails, live performances by **The Shins** and **The Like** and a soundtrack provided by DJs **Samantha Ronson** and **Brent Bolthouse**.

PARTY CROWD

THE ABSOLUT TERRACE OVERLOOKING HOLLYWOOD

PARIS HILTON

JC CHASEZ



MIKE TYSON AND FRIENDS

THE SHINS "CHANGE THE LIVES" OF CADILLAC'S (L-R) PAM RIEHL, KEITH SPONDIKE, JUDY SULLIVAN, AND STACY SPONDIKE

HOW TO...

COOK UP A SQUIRREL

Hey, just because metal band SHINEDOWN hail from Jacksonville, Florida, doesn't necessarily mean they're well-versed in the preparation of quirky, traditional Southern delicacies. Then again ...

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPH BY EMILY SHUR

Shinedown, left to right: Brent Smith, Barry Kerch, Jasin Todd, Brad Stewart.

1 SHOOT 'EM

JASIN TODD, GUITARIST: Use a 20-gauge shotgun or a .22 with a scope, and just blow the fuck out of a squirrel. Aim for the upper torso or head—the good meat's around the anus and leg area, so as long as you've got a couple of legs intact, you'll be all right.

2 SKIN 'EM

BRAD STEWART, BASSIST: Keep a foot on the tail, cut around the ass, and rip off the fur in one big piece. Skinned, it looks like a big white rat. Just an ugly, nasty motherfucker. But hey, eatin' squirrel is something to do. It's pretty George W. where we come from.

3 FRY 'EM

BRENT SMITH, SINGER: Roll the squirrel in flour and put it in a Fry Daddy. You don't want to grill 'em, it's definitely a deep-frying situation. As soon as it bobs to the top of the oil, it's done, like a chicken-fried steak. People who eat squirrel prefer it well-done.

4 SERVE 'EM

BARRY KERCH, DRUMMER: Natural Ice beer is always a perfect accompaniment for fried squirrel. And cheese grits go great with anything fried, so serve that as a side dish. Consider possibly frying up the testicles as an after-supper treat, to cleanse the palate.

PROP STYLIST: DAVID BOSS; GROOMING: ASIA GEIGER FOR CELESTINE

Cam'ron mistakenly orders drive-by shootings instead of drive-in burgers.

CAM'JACKED

ALLEGED CARJACKING LEADS TO CAM'RON TAKING A BULLET IN EACH ARM

HARLEM RAPPER CAM'RON was wounded in both arms after a gunman shot him in Washington, D.C., on October 23.

While the 29-year-old MC waited for a green light in his Lamborghini, an SUV pulled up alongside him, and an unidentified man stepped out and opened fire. A wounded Cam'ron then drove himself to Howard University Hospital. "Nobody's going to take a quarter-million-dollar car from me, let alone a five-cent piece of gum," said Cam'ron (born Cameron Giles) a week after the shooting.

Though the shooting was initially described as a "carjacking," police have since expressed doubts. "If you are going to carjack a car, you don't shoot first," an investigating officer said. No arrests had been made—even though police found the abandoned SUV the same night. Three days after the incident, the rapper premiered "Get 'Em Daddy (Remix)" on a New York radio station, a song whose lyrics toy with the idea of a murder plot: "I know a set up/Them old niggas know I'm about to take they spot." *NOEL BODDIE*

OBITS

MIKE GIBBINS 56, October 4, in Oviedo, Florida, of an undisclosed cause. Drummer for Badfinger, the Welsh rock group once called the next Beatles. The band recorded a few hits on the Beatles' Apple label, including "Come and Get It," written by Paul McCartney.

SHIRLEY HORN 71, October 20, in Cheverly, Maryland, of diabetes. Jazz-cabaret singer and pianist with a 50-year career that didn't take off until the '90s, when she released a string of top-selling jazz albums. Her performance on *I Remember Miles*, a 1998 tribute to Miles Davis, won a Grammy.

HAROLD LEVENTHAL 86, October 4, in New York City. Folk-music impresario who managed Woody Guthrie and introduced Bob Dylan at his first major New York show. Leventhal is said to have inspired the fictional Irving Steinbloom in the 2003 movie *A Mighty Wind*. Cause of death was not released.

Spector: Less hair, exactly the same amount of crazy.

DOWNSIZED!

AS PHIL SPECTOR'S MURDER CASE HEATS UP, HIS HAIR CALMS DOWN

A CALIFORNIA JUDGE has ruled that statements music producer Phil Spector made immediately following the fatal 2003 shooting of a woman in his Los Angeles mansion will be admissible in court.

Spector, whose hair, though still voluminous, has decreased significantly in circumference since a May court appearance (inset), told police on the night of the alleged murder that he "didn't mean" to shoot actress Lana Clarkson.

In the past, Spector's lawyers have argued that Clarkson's death was a suicide and have tried to keep their client's supposed confession out of court. Judge Larry Fidler countered by saying Spector's statements were admissible because they were voluntarily offered. *JOHANNA PIAZZA*

POP HISTORY 2003–2005 // THE EARLY ATTEMPTS TO FILM *GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'*

50 Cent's life story was originally to be a musical directed by *Moulin Rouge* auteur Baz Luhrmann, who filmed a few scenes with the rapper and co-star Leonardo DiCaprio.

After Luhrmann was fired, the producers decided to take the project in what was described to *Variety* as "more of a James Bond–type direction."

Then, of course, there was the notorious attempt to turn it into a cartoon ...

CAM'RON: MONIQUE BUNN/RETNA LTD.; SPECTOR, TOP: RAMEYPIX.COM; SPECTOR, INSET: AP PHOTO

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS // ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

"Young man was sitting at the wheel/On his way to make a pick-up/Turned off the air-con/Rolled down the window/And began to sweat."

20 SONGS YOU SHOULD DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 HOT CHIP
"OVER AND OVER" *DFA/ASTRALWERKS*
Proudly geeky Brits create a clanging, clattering, phenomenal dance monster.

2 CAT POWER
"THE GREATEST" *MATADOR*
The indie-rock hero goes country, kinda, with this slow, string-soaked meditation on dashed hopes and failed love.

3 YOUNG JEEZY
"MY HOOD" *DEF JAM*
The Atlanta rookie of the year salutes his neighborhood like a tougher Mr. Rogers.

4 THE WHITE STRIPES
"WALKING WITH A GHOST" *V2*
Jack and Meg meet Tegan and Sara on a woozy, distortion-heavy cover of the latter's paranormal breakup jam.

5 ASHANTI FEAT. PAUL WALL AND METHOD MAN
"STILL ON IT" *THE INC/DEF JAM*
Ashanti invites some homeys over and gets tough on a stripped-down and sleazy drum-machine beat.

6 MIKE SHINODA FEAT. GHOSTFACE KILLAH AND LUPE FIASCO
"SPRAY PAINT AND INKPENS" *[MIXTAPE]*
Linkin Park's MC weaves a tale of regret and suicide—and two fine hip-hop weirdos ride with him.

7 JENNY LEWIS
"THE CHARGING SKY" *TEAM LOVE*
The Rilo Kiley dreamboat gets her twang on about fearing death and trying to find religion.

8 NOTORIOUS B.I.G. FEAT. JAY-Z
"WHATCHU WANT" *BAD BOY*
Brooklyn's finest team up, from beyond the grave—and beyond the boardroom.

9 BRITNEY SPEARS
"AND THEN WE KISS" *JIVE*
Sleek neo-disco and breathy desire from Mama Spears.

10 JUELZ SANTANA
"OH YES" *DIPLOMATS/DEF JAM*
"Please Mr. Postman," reborn as a hard-hitting bragfest.

11 SHAKIRA
"DON'T BOTHER" *EPIC*
The Shak-attack returns in *ingles*, rocking out about being jealous of hot, French-speaking girls and suffering from undying—unrequited—love.

SONG OF THE MONTH!

12 ARCTIC MONKEYS
"I BET YOU LOOK GOOD ON THE DANCEFLOOR" *DOMINO*
Hyped U.K. foursome that actually deserve it make like a clean-cut, cleaned-up Libertines.

13 KEVIN FEDERLINE
"Y'ALL AIN'T READY" *[ONLINE]*
Stunningly, laughably skill-free—but that doesn't mean it's not fascinating.

14 J.R.
"FUCK YOU IF YOU DON'T LIKE ME" *[ONLINE]*
Deliciously scuzzy Dirty South rumble—rumored to be banned in clubs throughout the South for starting brawls.

15 R. KELLY
"TRAPPED IN THE CLOSET 6–12" *JIVE*
Midgets. Spatulas. Pregnancy. The love-triangle-turned-love-hexagon becomes a ludicrous—and genius—love infiniti-gon!

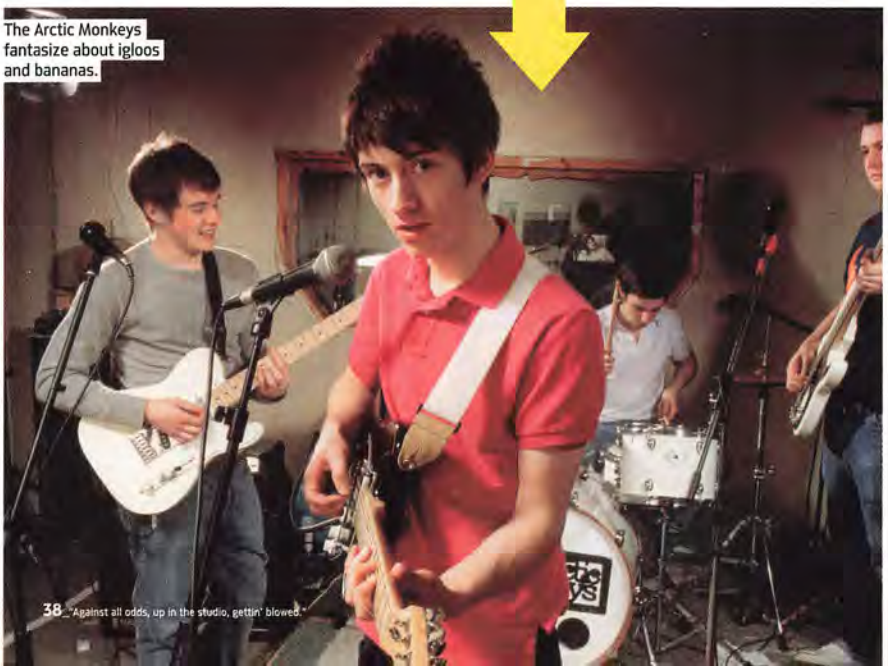
16 GANG GANG DANCE
"EGOWAR" *THE SOCIAL REGISTRY*
Downtown NYC artso-fartsos create a strange, gorgeous noise—it's like New Age for cool kids!

17 DR. DRE FEAT. SNOOP DOGG AND NATE DOGG
"NEXT EPISODE 2006" *[MIXTAPE]*
Andre tides over fans hungry for *Detox* with this horny, fat-bottomed G-funk reunion.

18 OUTKAST
"RATS AND ROACHES" *LAFACE*
A mellow, vintage-style 'Kast track slated for the *Idlewild* movie soundtrack.

19 THE STROKES
"ON THE OTHER SIDE" *RCA*
Julian moans about cosmic loneliness over a brawny disco-ska-cock-rock confection.

20 NEIL DIAMOND
"HELL YEAH" *COLUMBIA*
Celebratory but spare, the single from Diamond's hipster-credifying, sequin-suit-free new album.



The Arctic Monkeys fantasize about igloos and bananas.

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INSIDER

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GLAM-A-RAMA!

T. REX

MARC BOLAN WAS ALMOST A U.S. SUPERSTAR—UNTIL EGO AND DRUGS GOT IN HIS WAY ... (P. 46)

Marc Bolan: "No, I'm just happy to see you ..."

RIVERS CUOMO

SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK & ROLL: RIVERS CUOMO HAS ONLY ONE OF THESE LEFT IN HIS LIFE, AND EVEN THAT MAY BE ON ITS WAY OUT. AMERICA'S HIGHEST-CHARTING IVY LEAGUE UNDERGRAD SUBJECTS HIMSELF TO OUR READERS' POP QUIZ

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS BUCK

ANY STUDENT ENTERING the final semester of college is bound to experience a bit of anxiety about his future. But unlike most students entering the final semester of college, Rivers Cuomo (Harvard University, Class of 2006) is also the 35-year-old singer of a rock band that's sold over seven million albums and has a fortune lying virtually untouched in his bank account.

Cuomo greets *Blender* wearing a rumpled sports jacket but, curiously, not his trademark Buddy Holly horn-rims. Though it may be unwise to glean significance from this break in sartorial form, both Cuomo and his band are currently standing at a crossroads—or a precipice, depending on whom you ask.

Weezer's fifth album, *Make Believe*—equally riff-heavy but more introspective than its immediate predecessors—is an unequivocal hit, but ask Cuomo about any plans past spring semester, when he'll finally complete the three classes he needs to earn the English lit. degree he abandoned 15 years ago for rock stardom, and he instantly gets cagey. "I want to go to school, and after that, I want to get married and have a family," Cuomo says, speaking barely above a whisper. "And it doesn't seem like being on the road or working with a band is going to allow that to happen."

Cuomo's ambivalence about Weezer's future is especially puzzling given that he credits his recent immersion in the stringent form of meditation called Vipassana for making him feel more at ease with his songwriting, his bandmates (guitarist Brian Bell, drummer Pat Wilson and bassist Scott Shriner) and, you know, the universe in general. And it is this newfound sense of inner calm that has led Cuomo to a swanky Philadelphia hotel lounge, picking at a fruit plate while willfully subjecting himself to probing and prodding on behalf of *Blender*'s readership. *Namaste*, dude.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART ABOUT MAINTAINING THE TWO-YEAR VOW OF CELIBACY THAT WAS PART OF YOUR MEDITATION TRAINING?
GIRLDREAMS, SKOKIE, IL

It's been two and a half years now, actually. The vow is over but I wanted to keep cruising. Abstinence doesn't require as much self-discipline anymore. It's a combination of the old crazy Rivers and a belief that a serious meditator should just stick with one partner or be celibate. My teacher doesn't even recommend this technique. But I am an extreme type of person. We never had serious groupies, anyway. Our generation got screwed.

WHEN I SAW WEEZER LIVE, YOU GUYS CAME OUT TO THE *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL* THEME. ARE YOU SECRETLY JOCKS?
PINKERBOOTS, GLENDALE, CA

I don't think it's a secret: We love sports. We've come out to a lot of different things, whatever gets us stoked. Right now, we come out to Pinocchio singing "When You Wish Upon a Star." I think our favorite one of all time was the *Magnum, P.I.* theme song in 1997.

MTV MADE YOU CHANGE THE WORDS TO "WE ARE ALL ON DRUGS," SO YOU NOW SING "WE ARE ALL ON LOVE" INSTEAD. WHAT WERE OTHER IDEAS FOR REPLACEMENT WORDS?
BUDHOLLY, LAWRENCE, KS

Pat suggested "hugs" first, but that sounded too quirky. See, the whole thing is my fault—when I wrote the song, I wasn't thinking carefully enough about the words I was choosing. Some fans have told me that their children hear me saying "we are all on drugs" and they take it literally because they don't know any better. And that makes me feel horrible. I never wanted to write a song that would offend anyone or encourage anyone to use drugs or harm themselves in any way. In my mind, love and drugs are the same thing—we're all numbing ourselves or stimulating ourselves with intense relationships or TV or movies or music and we use these like drugs. So to me, there was no artistic sacrifice or compromise and I was happy to change the word. Brian thought of "we are all on love." To me, that's an even better line than the original lyric. It's still a good rock jam, though.

GROOMING: JACQUELINE BUSH FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PRIANO

"IN MY MIND, LOVE AND
DRUGS ARE THE SAME THING."

Paul Stanley of Kiss refutes gay rumors.

Hugh Hefner does same, with more success.

Cuomo and Shriner rock out preppily.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER MOST ABOUT PLAYING THE SUNSET STRIP WITH YOUR METAL BAND WHEN YOU FIRST MOVED TO L.A.?
TAPELES, CALABASAS, CA

I just remember how exciting it was, truly the heavy metal dream I had growing up. We'd go down on weekends and pass out our flyers. I thought of a clever marketing gimmick: We affixed a stick of gum to each flyer, so hundreds of people would come from all over the Strip and grab ours so they could get a piece of Big Red or Juicy Fruit.

WHAT'S THE MOST RIDICULOUS, DECADENT THING YOU'VE EVER BOUGHT?
AJARVIS, LITTLE COMPTON, RI

I give a lot of money away to family and friends and charity. The rest is just waiting in the bank for the day I have a family. I never think to spend my money except to give it away. Well, other than school—that's expensive. And I give big tips, which freaks people out sometimes. When I bought a house, I had to get all this furniture to make it look lived in, then realized I didn't really need any of this stuff and it means nothing to me. So why not move to a little apartment and get rid of it all? Now I live in a one-room loft.

"I HAVE A PROBLEM DEALING WITH PEOPLE, SO I'D RATHER EAT CEREAL EVERY DAY THAN ORDER IN."

YOU'VE ADMITTED USING DRUGS TO HELP YOUR SONGWRITING. WHAT'S THE MOST EXTREME THING YOU'VE EVER DONE TO BE CREATIVE?
NOTTIREDOFSEX, DALLAS, TX

I don't really like to talk about the extremes—they're the least important to me, yet that's what people like to focus on the most. The important thing you're looking for with any stimulus or inspiration is concentration. You're looking for something to demand your attention so strongly that you can write a coherent statement about it lyrically or musically. Ritalin, or even coffee, can help that. I wrote "Dope Nose" and "Hash Pipe" with a combination of three tequila shots and Ritalin. There are other side effects specific to each kind of stimulant that affect the tone of what you write. It's very scientific, finding the right balance, a lot of trial and error. A lot of error.

WHO CAME UP WITH YOUR VAN HALENESQUE "W" ONSTAGE LOGO?
CANTDRIVE55, SALT LAKE CITY, UT

If I remember the story correctly, our webmaster Karl took some tape and put a "W" on the back of my jacket while I was wearing it. Pat looked at it and put the wings on to make it more like Van Halen.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE GROWING UP ON AN ASHRAM?
JHEFFER, WOODSTOCK, NY

That's a very large question. I was at school there from third through fifth grade, and every day we did yoga and meditation and deep relaxation exercises, we did all our own cooking and cleaning, we did all kinds of chores. It wasn't all that fun at the time. That was some serious work for kids, or anyone, really. From my earliest memories, my mom instilled in my brother and me that we were different and special and the rest of the world was "normal" and uptight and not in touch with their feelings. And we were this special, unique enclave of sanity. Deep in my heart, I knew there was a lot of value to the environment my parents were raising us in; however, around age 11 or 12, a lot of us kids in the ashram school started rebelling and fantasizing about being normal and having our own desks. We all took normal names. I changed mine to Peter Kitts—that was my stepfather's last name. We started teaching ourselves how to swear. School colors, a school mascot, to be on a football team—all those things seemed really attractive to us.

WHEN YOUR SECOND ALBUM, *PINKERTON*, BOMBED, YOU TOOK THE CRITICISM HARD. IS THAT STILL PAINFUL TO THINK ABOUT?
IMONDRUGS, FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

Back in 1997, I took that personally, yeah. We sent "El Scorcho," the first single, to a radio station and they said it was the worst song they'd ever heard and they wouldn't play it. But I don't have my own ego wrapped up in the album anymore. There are *Pinkerton* fans who come to our shows, so we're always sure to play two or three songs every night. The audience divines it.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THIS HARDCORE MEDITATION ROUTINE?
THEADMIRAL, SPARTANBURG, SC

In early 2003, I felt like I hit a roadblock with the songs for *Make Believe* and I just knew I wanted to dig deeper into myself and come up with better songs. [Producer] Rick Rubin suggested meditation. As soon as I started trying it again, I knew this was it. Vipassana is a less well-known form of meditation in this country and I'm not sure why that is. I think so far, the press has misunderstood the purpose of the apparent austerities. The belief is that two meals a day are enough, especially for someone who's just sitting there. It's all about moderation. Things appear extreme, but the motivation behind all of it is solely to help you concentrate.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE AND LEAST FAVORITE PARTS OF YOUR BODY?
AMANDA, BROOKLINE, MA

I guess my hands are my favorite. I'm sometimes unhappy with my right leg, which was operated on because it was shorter than the other. The bone was broken clean in half and I had to turn these screws so the gap between the halves of the bone would get wider, which was actually kind of satisfying. But I'm trying to love all parts of my body equally and not generate negative feelings toward myself.

DID YOU HANG OUT WITH HUGH HEFNER WHEN YOU SHOT THE "BEVERLY HILLS" VIDEO AT THE PLAYBOY MANSION?
JOEMOMMA, FOREST HILLS, NY

I didn't hang out with Hef. But I know it was asked of him, "What do you do on a normal day when there isn't a video being shot in your house?" And he said, "I do the same thing: I sit here around the pool with the Playmates and play cards."

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL THING ABOUT WEEZER?
SLAYER99, NORTH FORK, CA

The guitar sound. I don't really think it's changed much from my metal days, and I don't think that came from any other influences—it had to come from the Scorpions or Judas Priest. And also guitar solos. We suddenly realized we're one of the only bands that play guitar solos. I couldn't imagine not having a guitar solo; that's just what happens after the second chorus.

STANLEY: LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS; HEFNER: EVERETT COLLECTION INC.; WEEZER: KELLY A. SWIFT/RETNA LTD.

Tom Selleck offers Ferrari, mustache rides.

"Are we all on drugs? Why do you ask?"

NOW THAT YOU'VE ALMOST GOT YOUR LITERATURE DEGREE, WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE BOOK?
ELSCORCHO, BEND, OR

Books aren't very important to me. When I was 20 and first going to college, I was really into literature and that's why I chose that major. I'm not gonna be a professor, I'm not going to be a writer, I'm a rock guy. But I believe in finishing what I started. I enjoy school but I'm not, like, a serious reader.

YOU PLAYED IN A KISS COVER BAND GROWING UP—WHICH ONE WERE YOU?
KHANKS, PARMA, OH

My ego was already apparent even at the tender age of 14—I was singing Paul Stanley's parts and played Ace Frehley's leads. Our makeup looked more like Mötley Crüe, though. We thought of ourselves as an original band that was going to make it; it didn't occur to us that a band had to write their own songs. I was also in a Metallica cover band, an Yngwie Malmsteen cover band and an all-'80s metal cover band. All I did in high school was play metal songs.

DIDN'T YOU TRY TO CALCULATE THE MATHEMATICAL EQUATION FOR A PERFECT POP SONG?
TJHOOKER, AUSTIN, TX

That's a pretty gross oversimplification. I've always deconstructed music and tried to figure out the order in which the parts were put together. In what order did the writer come up with the various elements? Did he start with the music or the riff or the melody or the beat? It wasn't out of a desire to find one particular formula that would always work for anything I did but rather just to get a sense of all the possibilities that are out there. When I write a song, I'm just going on my instincts and when I'm writing at my best, it's different every time. I remember asking Billie Joe years ago about some of the songs on the first Green Day album, ones with some pretty intense guitar riffs at the root, and he didn't write them on a guitar, he wrote those in his head. I don't remember exactly what my theory was on those songs, but I know I was surprised. Another one that really blew my mind was "Bridge Over Troubled Water," this really beautiful piano song, right? I read that it was written on guitar. I think it was one of the pillars of my theory that piano songs are better than guitar songs.

HOW DOES A ROCK STAR LIKE YOU USUALLY MEET GIRLS?
EMCEEBARD, KALAMAZOO, MI

I don't. I'm almost more of a rock star at school than on the road, although they treat me pretty normally. I live in the undergraduate dorm, I go to the cafeteria three times a day, I go to the library and the fitness center and hang out with people in my hall and have normal relationships. I forget that I'm 35 and a rock star ... until I look in the mirror.

YOU'VE MENTIONED RECENTLY THAT YOU'VE GOTTEN INTO COOKING. WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MEAL TO MAKE?
GINA, NASHVILLE, TN

I don't really have a signature dish and I can't remember the names of anything, but it's all vegetarian. Cooking started out of necessity—I had to eat and I didn't have anyone to help me. I bought a cookbook and was really putting some effort into it. I still have a problem dealing with people, so I'd rather eat cereal every day than order in.

DO YOU STILL LIVE IN A ONE-ROOM APARTMENT WITH THE BLACK WALLS AND BLACKED-OUT WINDOWS?
JERRY, DARIEN, CT

Not anymore. That was also about focus. Twice a day I close my eyes and meditate, and that's really all the concentration practice I need. I find that my mind's getting stronger in any situation.

IS *MAKE BELIEVE* GOING TO BE THE FINAL WEEZER ALBUM?
SCOOTERPEPPY, STOCKTON, CA

Well, any album can be the last one for any artist. In the band, we're definitely all aware that there's this place in me that for some reason is hesitating to commit to future plans, and none of us is really sure what that's about. I feel like I have to settle down and have a stable life. It's painful because whatever's going to happen is going to happen; there's no point in stressing about it now. I have some hang-up and that's causing anxiety for the band and for the audience. I think they're handling it very graciously and not giving me guilt trips or anything.

IN THE CURRENT OZZY OSBOURNE VS. IRON MAIDEN BEEF, WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?
ANDREW_CLARK, SMYRNA, GA

Well, I don't know enough detail to take sides, but I guess I would take both sides and hope there's a way they can work things out so they're both happy. But I was definitely more of a fan of Maiden growing up than Ozzy.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO *HOMIE*, THE ALBUM YOU MADE WITH YOUR HARVARD PALS?
LUKE T., RAMSEY, NJ

Never finished it. We did all the basic tracks, but no overdubs. That was around 1997. I have plenty of unreleased songs, but no interest in putting them out. There's too much garbage out there already.

ARE YOU A TIT MAN OR AN ASS MAN?
DEBORAH, DULUTH, GA

I don't remember. [BLENDER]

SELLECK: EVERETT COLLECTION INC.; WEEZER: SEAN MURPHY/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA LTD.

The Greatest Songs Ever

BLENDER EXPLORES THE FINEST TUNES IN HISTORY

34 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH — JANUARY 1972

"MARC BOLAN was a pompous son of a bitch," laughs longtime friend and collaborator Mark Volman, "and I loved him for it."

As the 1970s revved into life, the world lay invitingly at glam pixie Marc Bolan's stack-heel-booted feet. Impishly sexy, he looked like the missing link between Bob Dylan and Robert Smith, and his band T. Rex were laying waste to U.K. rock charts. To complete his plans for world domination, however, Bolan needed just one more thing: a major U.S. hit. He boasted the talent, the looks and the money, but like all aspiring world-dominators, he had a fatal flaw—one that Volman, a founding member of '60s popsters the Turtles, points out: unbridled arrogance.

An evolutionary step forward from Bolan's acoustic folk-psychedelic unit Tyrannosaurus Rex, T. Rex had become British heroes by strapping on electric guitars and rocking out—re-inventing '50s Chuck Berry–style simplicity for a younger, feather-boa-clad generation.

In the spring of 1971, Bolan started work on a song that could finally crash U.S. shores. It was a monstrous, R&B-inspired hip-shaker about some seriously far-out sex—and an acknowledged ripoff of Berry's "Little Queenie." T. Rex's drummer, Bill Legend, remembers helping Bolan write the song—originally titled "Get It On"—when the group was touring America. "He called me into his room," Legend has said. "We sat on the bed and he played it through. He told me, 'We're gonna record it when we get to L.A.'"

Despite his hand in the song's creation, Legend has confirmed that Bolan's cockiness bordered on monomania. "Steve and I were basically hired hands. Marc's attitude seemed to be, 'I'm in charge here. If you don't like it, piss off.'"

When T. Rex's tour swung into Los Angeles for a gig at the Whisky-a-Go-Go, Bolan played "Get It On" for producer Tony Visconti during an all-night Laurel Canyon jam. "We were singing it for hours and banging things for percussion," Visconti has said. "We were totally vibed to record it the next day."

Those vibes were chemically enhanced, according to bongo man Mickey Finn. "In Los Angeles, coke was the musicians' pay. We were in the studio laughing and snorting and Marc's curiosity brought him down and he got into it."

Although Volman acknowledges that the devil's dandruff showered the sessions, he denies it was part of the creative process. "It wasn't a drug record. Coke was just a fun thing, and Marc was very much in control of what was being recorded."

Volman recalls that the song was far from complete when the sessions began. "It had the musical segments pretty much in place, but it didn't have words except for the chorus. We did all our background vocals first, which was a blast, because Marc decided to leave in some of our mistakes, like where we start to sing the chorus at the wrong point. You can actually hear us laughing during some of the drone sections. We had the whole atmosphere of the song before he had any words for the verses other than 'You're dirty and sweet.'"

What Bolan put together at Wally Heider's Studio was an infectiously upbeat, juggernaut groove that he topped off with erotic nonsense lyrics about a fantasy girl. She's "built like a car," wears "a cloak full of eagles" and sports a "hub cap diamond star halo."

Returning to London, Bolan recruited Ian McDonald of King Crimson for saxophone and Yes's Rick Wakeman for keyboards. Wakeman has recalled, "I got a fee of £9 ($27) for doing a few glissandos down the keys, which was fine—it paid my rent."

But Bolan wasn't done. "The only thing that took time was the lead guitar track," he said in a 1971 interview. "I did four, which I wasn't happy with. The trouble was that I was playing too much."

"Get It On" topped the British singles chart in the summer of 1971, but American release was held back for almost six months. When Reprise Records put it out, they changed the title to "Bang a Gong" to avoid confusion with another "Get It On" by a jazz-rock combo called Chase.

The rechristened song quickly shimmied into the Top 10—Bolan had his Yankee hit. But even though it was followed by a string of British smashes, it would be his first and last Stateside success, a fact that Bolan chalked up to a packed touring schedule: "I should have come over and followed it up, but we were so busy all over the rest of the world, we didn't have time."

Volman, however, suggests that Bolan's arrogance rebounded on him. "He said in one high-profile interview that he didn't need America or the American press, and that antagonized them, so they tended to write about his attitude rather than his music."

"BANG

His ego was a problem, but Bolan's chemical and alcohol dependencies, which were spiraling out of control, certainly didn't help. "He developed a cocaine habit and drank himself into stupors," Mickey Finn has said. "He put on three stone and he was described by a newspaper as a 'glittering chipolata.'" Any lingering dreams of a follow-up were shattered on September 16, 1977, when Bolan's girlfriend smashed his purple Mini into a tree in a London suburb with Bolan in the passenger seat, ending his life at the age of 29. The song stormed the charts a second time via a 1985 Power Station cover, and inspired Oasis's "Cigarettes and Alcohol." More recently, it was used to great effect in the *Jarhead* trailer—not that Bolan would ever have been caught in something so unglamorous as camo pants. [BLENDER]

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG "Bang a Gong (Get It On)"
ARTIST T. Rex
LABEL Reprise
PERFORMERS
Marc Bolan *guitar/vocals*, Mickey Finn *bongos/vocals*, Steve Currie *bass*, Bill Legend *drums*, Howard Kaylan *backing vocals*, Mark Volman *backing vocals*, Ian McDonald *saxophones*, Rick Wakeman *keyboards*
PRODUCER: Tony Visconti
CHART DEBUT: January 1, 1972
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: 10

WHO'S WHO

MARC BOLAN
Corkscrew-haired pop pixie whose pioneering glam-rock band T. Rex came within a sequin's breadth of ruling the world before his death in 1977.

RICK WAKEMAN
Prog-rock keyboard wiz with Yes, Britain's top session player of the early '70s—and now a U.K. TV celebrity.

TONY VISCONTI
Legendary U.K. producer and musical arranger whose credits run from David Bowie and U2 to the Dandy Warhols.

OPPOSITE: KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS/RETNA LTD.

A GONG (GET IT ON)"

ARMED WITH UNDENIABLE HOOKS AND MONSTER CHARM, T. REX LEADER MARC BOLAN COULD HAVE BEEN A SUPERSTAR—BUT COKE AND EGO THWARTED HIS WORLD-DOMINATING PLANS

BY JOHNNY BLACK

My Music

OUR FAVORITE STARS' FAVORITE RECORDS

THE ALBUM THAT
GOT ME THROUGH LAW SCHOOL

SONIC YOUTH
GOO
GEFFEN, 1990
"It all starts with Sonic Youth for me. 'Tunic (Song for Karen)' was such an inspirational song—listening to "I ain't never going anywhere" over and over again helped me get through law school [in Melbourne, before she started acting]. And Kim Gordon is just an idol. I met her once and found myself holding onto her arm with both hands. Then I realized I was a crazy fan and should let go."

THE ALBUM THAT
READS LIKE A BOOK

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS
HENRY'S DREAM
MUTE, 1992
"I heard Nick Cave for the first time on an independent radio station in Australia, and the way he uses words is breathtaking. And it's very melodic at the same time, very anthem-like. He also wrote a book called *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, from the perspective of a fetus in a womb. He's really arrogant, but he can afford to be."

THE ALBUM THAT
BRINGS THE DRAMA

PJ HARVEY
TO BRING YOU MY LOVE
ISLAND, 1995
"This one goes hand in hand with Nick Cave—it has that kind of storytelling, that angst. I'm not a religious person, but there's a kind of visceral thing about religion that's almost sexual. There's so much drama and desperation on all of the tracks, except for that one song that doesn't feel like it belongs: 'Down By the Water,' which was the only hit. I never understood that."

THE ALBUM THAT'S
HOPELESS, BUT IN A GOOD WAY

SEBADOH
HARMACY
SUB POP, 1996
"I originally had their album *Bakesale* on my list, and there's nothing wrong with that one. But *Harmacy* I listened to a hell of a lot. It's a bit easier on the ears. There's something sad and a little bit pathetic about Lou Barlow, which I like. And there's a sweetness too. His lyrics are introspective and insecure, but there's a relatable hopelessness about them."

THE ALBUM THAT'S
TOO GRIM FOR ELLEN

DINOSAUR JR
GREEN MIND
BLANCO Y NEGRO/SIRE, 1991
"I had to seriously wonder about myself when I looked at my list. The bleaker the better. I've tried to get Ellen to listen to some of this—she likes Stevie Wonder, which is great, but sometimes you just want something … I mean, 'Blowing It'? Fuck. J Mascis made me pick up a guitar, because I wanted to learn to play that song. I took lessons, but no one can play like him. I was like, 'Why can't I do that?'"

THE ALBUM THAT'S
JUST FOR KICKS

IGGY POP
LUST FOR LIFE
VIRGIN, 1977
"All of the records here have a whole heap of drama … except for Iggy. There's just something about him—he's raw and ugly and fun. And there's some great guitar in there too. I love his energy and I love the way he bounces around the stage. He's got that 'I could give a fuck' attitude and it's more fun to listen to because it's not so introspective. It's like everyone is kind of vomiting all over you."

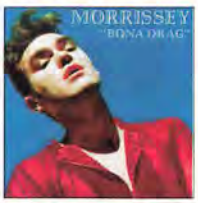
THE ALBUM THAT'S
FOR THE PEOPLE

NIRVANA
NEVERMIND
DGC, 1991
"It's important to me to find music that feels like my own private experience, music that you think not everybody gets, which is, ridiculously, why I almost didn't include this. It's a stupid kind of snobbery, I guess. But I remember the first time I heard 'Smells Like Teen Spirit'—I think everybody does. It has all the right elements. It spoke to everyone individually at the same time. That's an incredible feat."

THE ALBUM THAT
MESSES WITH MY HEAD

RADIOHEAD
KID A
CAPITOL, 2000
"I love experimental sound—Radiohead were so good at melodic music, and then they fucked with it so hardcore here. It showed so much range and so much depth. This separates them from the bands that can make pretty sounds, like Coldplay. That's a nice band and those are pretty songs, but to be able to use synthesized sound and have it come from such an intelligent, honest place? Blows me away."

THE ALBUM THAT
MAKES DEPRESSION FUN!



MORRISSEY
BONA DRAG
SIRE/REPRISE, 1990
"What I love about Morrissey is that his lyrics are just unbelievable. He puts so much humor into them and I don't know how he does it. 'Why do you come here and why do you hang around?' You smile at the depths of depression and isolation and anxiety he feels. His songs are so pretty, but he's singing about the ugliest things. He manages to make it sound like, 'Oh well, that's just the way it is.' I love the theatrics of it all."

THE ALBUM THAT
ACTUALLY CAME OUT THIS DECADE

THE ARCADE FIRE
FUNERAL
MERGE, 2004
"When I looked at my list I thought it was very narrow. Like a specific sliver in time. But recently … have you heard the Arcade Fire? When I heard this album, I was dumbfounded. I heard—it may not be true—that there was a fire in an arcade in their hometown that killed 20 kids they went to school with, and this whole record is that story. I don't know how long they've been around, but definitely a band to watch."

Portia reads Sonic Youth liner notes just for the articles.

"THE BLEAKER THE BETTER."

GRUNGE! LO-FI! MOPING! TAKE A LOOK THROUGH THE '90S-OBSESSED RECORD COLLECTION OF SECRETLY AUSTRALIAN ACTRESS/ELLEN GALPAL PORTIA DE ROSSI AND IT'S OBVIOUS THAT *ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT* ISN'T JUST A LUCRATIVE AND HILARIOUS TV GIG—IT'S A WAY OF LIFE.

BY ERIC ALT
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF LIPSKY

Ask Blender

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

DID R.E.M. REALLY CHANGE THE TITLE OF "FUCK ME KITTEN" TO "STAR ME KITTEN" BECAUSE WAL-MART TOLD THEM TO?

JEFF PEABODY, TEANECK, NJ

It wasn't Wal-Mart that persuaded R.E.M. to ditch the "Fuck"—it was Meg Ryan! No, really. In 1992, the group were recording at Seattle's Bad Animals studio while the Hollywood star was filming *Sleepless in Seattle*; visiting the session, she was treated to the band's new ode to carnality. Living up to her cutesy image, she pointed out that as a child she was never allowed to buy a record with the word "fuck" on the sleeve. The band agreed to change the title, substituting the word "Star" as a play on the "f***" stars (it was also an allusion to "Star, Star," the retitled name of the Rolling Stones' "Star Fucker" on the sleeve of 1973's *Goat's Head Soup*).

WORD AT SCHOOL IS THAT CIARA IS A POST-OP TRANSSEXUAL. IS THIS RIGHT?

FRANK KNEWSON, HUDSON, NY

Sorry to break the news, but not everything you hear in the cafeteria is true. In late 2004, a story made the rounds online that the R&B star was either a transvestite or had been born with both male and female genitalia. According to some dubious message-board reports, Ciara had even revealed this herself on *Oprah* (of course!). Somehow, the singer saw the funny side in this, laughing to the *New York Daily News*: "I've never been on *Oprah* in my life!"

This recalls an even more gruesome tale concerning another star (with a similar-sounding name), Khia. Word spread that the raunchy rapper had been murdered by her boyfriend, a story she blamed on her bitter former record label, saying: "The radio stations here, instead of confirming it, they get on the air and blast it and then try to confirm it later. It don't matter. Controversy sells. I'm alive and well."

WHICH ALBUMS HAVE BEEN MADE IN HAUNTED HOUSES/STUDIOS?

BILL BOOTHE, NILAND, CA

There's quite a long tradition. Producer Rick Rubin's home studio in L.A.'s Laurel Canyon—where the Red Hot Chili Peppers recorded 1991's *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*—is reportedly haunted. Anthony Kiedis claimed "floating nebulous shapes" showed up on four photos taken for an album cover session. The Mars Volta also felt a "presence" while recording *De-Loused in the Comatorium* there in 2002.

Vancouver's Greenhouse facility, where Nickelback recorded *Silver Side Up*, also has ghost issues, with Chad Kroeger reporting that producers working late have "seen, heard, felt and smelled spirits."

Haunted sessions were, perhaps unsurprisingly, a real hazard for 1970s heavy metal bands. While recording Led Zeppelin's fourth album at the English mansion Headley Grange, Jimmy Page apparently glimpsed a gray figure on the stairway. "I turned around pretty fast, because I didn't really want to have an encounter with something like that," he said.

Zeppelin rivals Black Sabbath were also visited while rehearsing *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* in England's Clearwell Castle. The band was playing in the castle dungeon when a black-coated figure walked past. "Tony and one of the roadies ran after the person," Geezer Butler recalled. "They went into the room where he had gone into and there was nobody in there; he totally disappeared."

Radiohead's *OK Computer*—recorded in an English mansion owned by miniseries superstar Jane Seymour—is the most acclaimed album recorded with a ghost present. "To begin with, it was curious about us," said Thom Yorke. "Then it got bored with us. It started doing things like turning the studio tape machines on and off, rewinding them."

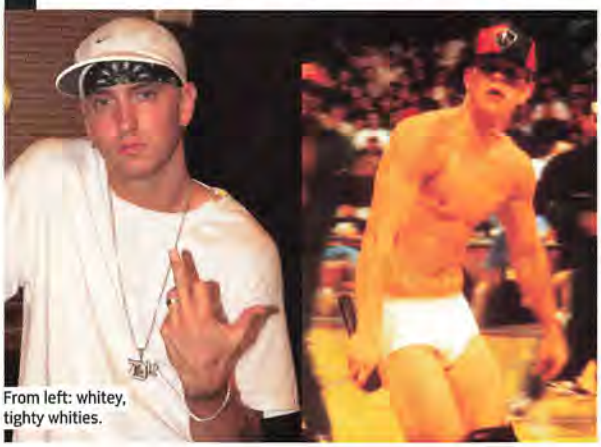
Of course, none of these paranormal experiences could possibly be connected to the musicians' use of soft drugs.

Ciara: not a man.

DID MARK WAHLBERG AND EMINEM REALLY GET INTO A SCREAMING MATCH ON *TRL*?

KATTI FREMONTE, SEDONA, AZ

Not quite. There was no outright clash on the 2000 episode of *TRL* both stars appeared on, but apparently Eminem was amused when asked by an MTV employee not to mention thespian Wahlberg's far less credible past as white rapper Marky Mark. So, with a bug-eyed expression, Eminem alluded to Wahlberg's old backing group the Funky Bunch, saying: "We'll just stand around like one big fun bunch!" Eminem later recalled, "Marky looked away and shit when I said that, with a look that was like, 'fuckin' dick.'" Asked later about his musical tastes, Wahlberg got in a return jab, saying, "I usually don't like white people who do music."



From left: whitey, tighty whities.

There's still clearly some tension. In early 2005, Wahlberg—who spent time in jail as a youth—questioned Eminem's claims to a harsh upbringing. "My childhood wasn't like some *8 Mile* bullshit where you go and have a rap-off," he sneered.

I HEARD DON HENLEY ONCE WENT APESHIT OVER THE WAY HIS TOILET PAPER WAS HUNG. WHAT'S THE STORY?

S.R. GOLAPARTHINAN, NEW YORK, NY

The Eagles singer was notorious for sounding off in letters, faxes and memos about anything and everything. Once in the late '70s, while recording *The Long Run*, he wrote a detailed memo for the studio manager. His complaint? That the toilet paper had been hung so the sheets came off the bottom rather than the top of the roll. "It was a joke," he later shrugged. "But don't you think it should come off the top?" [BLENDER]

YOUR QUESTIONS

***Ask Blender**, 1040 Sixth Avenue, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018*

***E-mail:** askblender@blender.com*

Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province.

EMINEM: JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC.COM; WAHLBERG: BARRY KING/WIREIMAGE.COM; CIARA: JUSTIN STEPHENS

PUMA ROCKS!

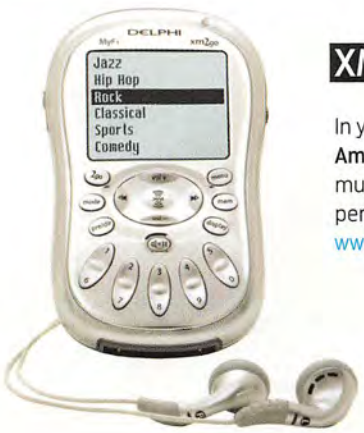
On October 11, Blender and Puma proved that when music and fashion join forces, the result is pure synergy. Puma celebrated the opening of their Georgetown store with an exclusive after-hours shopping experience featuring an electrifying performance from The Redwalls. Guests browsed Puma's latest styles, danced to tunes like "Thank You" and "Robinson Crusoe" and were treated to complimentary Sparks energy drink, hors d'oeuvres and gift bags.

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

RING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH CABO WABO

New Year's resolution #1: Be a trend-setter. Drink **Cabo Wabo Tequila**. Recent winner of the American Culinary ChefsBest™'s award for its superior quality taste, Cabo Wabo blanco tequila is this year's must-have for any occasion. www.cabowabo.com



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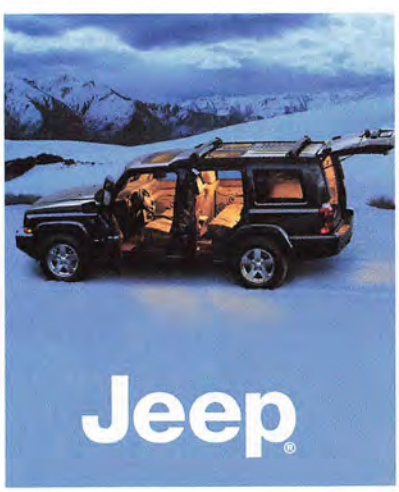
XM SATELLITE RADIO

THE JEEP BRAND AND BLENDER AT THE WINTER X GAMES

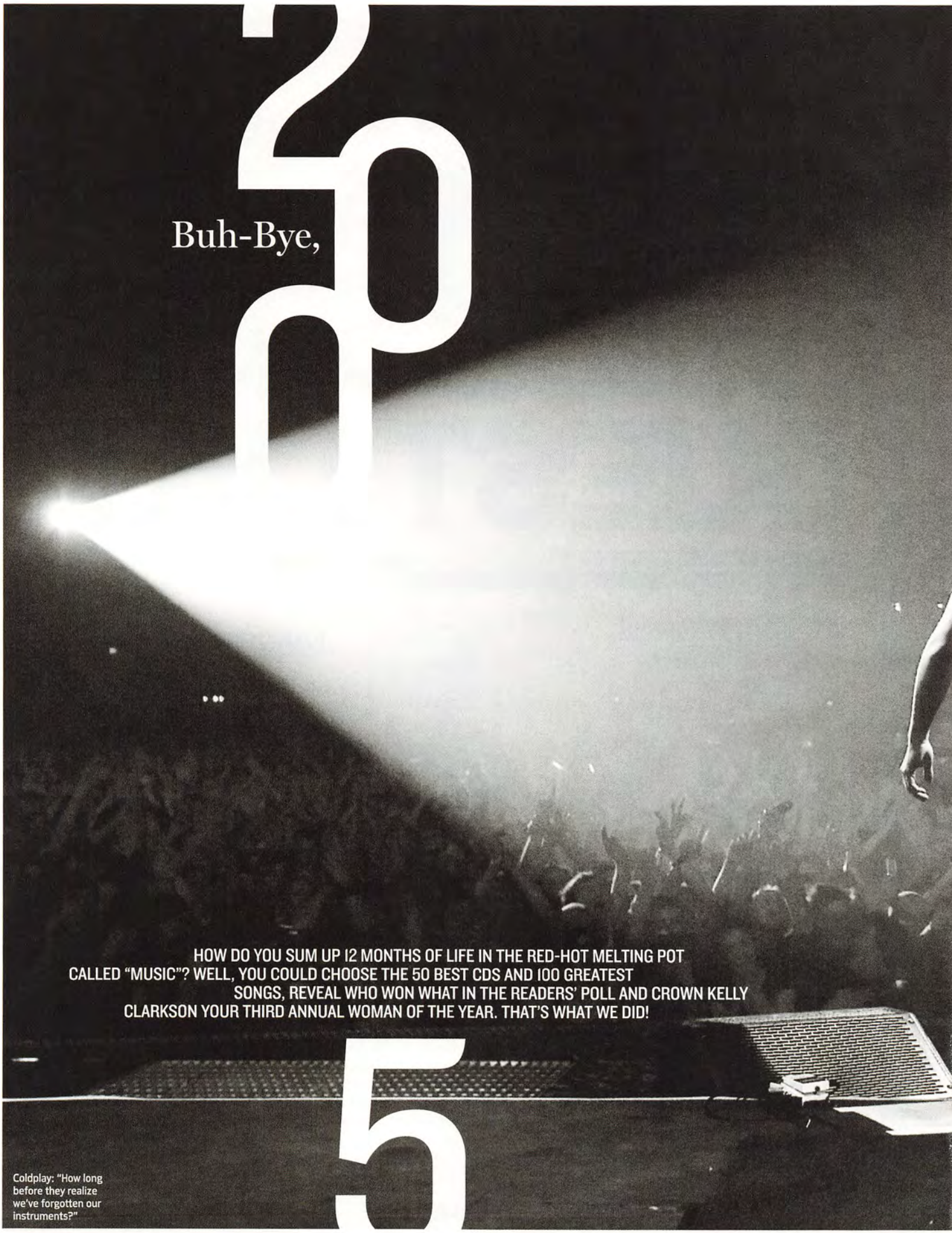
Pack up your parkas, strap on your skis! On January 28 and 29, Blender and **The Jeep Brand** are rocking the **Winter X Games** in Aspen with **Blender House on Ice**, a weekend-long music extravaganza. **Meet the athletes, party with the band** and **check out the coolest 2006 Jeep 4x4's**! Go to blender.com for party details and to RSVP - see ya on the slopes!

BLENDER HOUSE



Buh-Bye, 2005

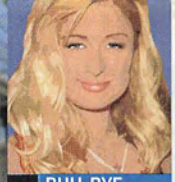
HOW DO YOU SUM UP 12 MONTHS OF LIFE IN THE RED-HOT MELTING POT CALLED "MUSIC"? WELL, YOU COULD CHOOSE THE 50 BEST CDS AND 100 GREATEST SONGS, REVEAL WHO WON WHAT IN THE READERS' POLL AND CROWN KELLY CLARKSON YOUR THIRD ANNUAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR. THAT'S WHAT WE DID!



Coldplay: "How long before they realize we've forgotten our instruments?"

The Year in Music

PENNY HOWLE



BUH-BYE

'05

THE 2005

READERS' POLL

TO FIND THE BEST, WORST AND MOST INANE OF THIS PAST YEAR, *BLENDER* TURNED TO THE AUTHORITIES WHO KNOW BEST. AND THEN WE TURNED TO YOU ...

Green Day: "Are you ready to rock, New Jersey?"

GREEN DAY: MICHAEL MULLER/CORBIS OUTLINE; HILTON: LAWRENCE LUCIER/WIREIMAGE.COM

1
HERO OF THE YEAR

a.	Billie Joe Armstrong	26.7%
b.	Kanye West	19.2%
c.	Mariah Carey	17%
d.	Bob Geldof	14.3%
e.	Fiona Apple	12%
f.	Chris Martin	10.8%

OK, maybe he didn't rescue any kittens from trees, but the Green Day kingpin *did* lead his band from faded '90s stars to sold-out stadiums on the strength of a lefty concept album. However, Erin from Kansas City thinks we might be taking a few liberties with the term: "Chris Martin? Mariah Carey? Heroes? What are they saving us from, better music?"

2
LOSER OF THE YEAR

a.	Michael Jackson	48.8%
b.	Lil' Kim	17.2%
c.	Nick Lachey	15%
d.	DMX	5.7%
e.	Phil Spector	6.7%
f.	Paula Abdul	6.6%

With nary a conviction, cuckolding or sordid sex-for-*American-Idol*-vote scandal under his overly ornate belt, the recently exonerated Michael Jackson may be the only candidate who actually had something *good* happen to him this year. Yet that didn't stop you from crowning him King of Pop Losers.

4
NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR

a.	My Chemical Romance	42.2%
b.	Fall Out Boy	27.6%
c.	M.I.A.	18.9%
d.	Young Jeezy	9.3%

The Jersey Goth kids run away with newbie honors, but reader Chuck Smith of Tuscon, Arizona, ruins everything by insisting their first album came out in July 2002. Thanks, Chuck. Thanks for nothin'.

5
SONG OF THE YEAR

a.	Kelly Clarkson, "Since U Been Gone"	32.1%
b.	The Killers, "Mr. Brightside"	21.9%
c.	Green Day, "Boulevard of Broken Dreams"	17.5%
d.	Kanye West feat. Jamie Foxx, "Gold Digger"	12.5%
e.	Fall Out Boy, "Sugar, We're Going Down"	6.9%
f.	Weezer, "We Are All on Drugs"	6.3%
g.	R. Kelly "Trapped in the Closet"	1.5%
h.	Mike Jones, "Still Tippin'"	1.3%

All of which proves our theory: People really seem to like that Kelly Clarkson song!

6
LYRIC OF THE YEAR

a.	"This shit is bananas/B-A-N-A-N-A-S." (Gwen Stefani, "Hollaback Girl")	33%
b.	"I'm so movin' on." (Kelly Clarkson, "Since U Been Gone")	25.4%
c.	"Your famous friend, well, I blew him before you." (Franz Ferdinand, "Do You Want To?")	19.1%
d.	"We want pre-nup!" (Kanye West feat. Jamie Foxx, "Gold Digger")	11.6%
e.	"Wait till you see my dick." (Ying Yang Twins, "Wait (The Whisper Song)")	8.1%
f.	"Tramps like us, and we like tramps." (The Hold Steady, "Charlemagne in Sweatpants")	2.8%

Thanks to Gwen and her cheerleaders, "bananas" became this year's Word Least Likely to Cause Confusion During a Spelling Bee.

7
VIDEO OF THE YEAR

a.	Green Day, "Wake Me Up When September Ends"	33.4%
b.	Missy Elliott, "Lose Control"	22.5%
c.	Beck, "Girl"	17.2%
d.	Fall Out Boy, "Sugar, We're Going Down"	12.8%
e.	R. Kelly, "Trapped in the Closet"	7.5%
f.	OK Go, "A Million Ways"	6.7%

Green Day's doomed Iraq War romance trumps all, including OK Go's low-budget choreography.

3 ALBUM OF THE YEAR

21.9%
a. Coldplay, *X&Y*

18.9%
b. Mariah Carey, *The Emancipation of Mimi*

15.1%
c. The White Stripes, *Get Behind Me Satan*

14.2%
d. Kanye West, *Late Registration*

11.1%
e. Franz Ferdinand, *You Could Have It So Much Better ...*

8.2%
f. Beck, *Guero*

7.2%
g. Fiona Apple, *Extraordinary Machine*

3.4%
h. 50 Cent, *The Massacre*

Colin Mangold of Rolla, North Dakota, probably wasn't one of the many readers who gave the nod to Coldplay. "Can Chris Martin stop sucking your dicks so you can stop talking about his alleged greatness?" Silly Colin—it's not the blowjobs, it's the cash.

ARMSTRONG: MICHAEL MALLER/CORBIS OUTLINE; MCR: DARAGH MCDONAGH/RETNA LTD.; JACKSON: AP PHOTO/CARLO ALLEGRI

8
OVEREXPOSED BLONDE OF THE YEAR

a.	Paris Hilton	47.4%
b.	Jessica Simpson	20.9%
c.	Lindsay Lohan	13.6%
d.	Gwen Stefani	7.8%
e.	Hilary Duff	7.4%
f.	Courtney Love	2.9%

Lindsay knocks herself out of the running with a late-2005 switch to brunette. Well played.

9
CUTEST COUPLE OF THE YEAR, OMG!

a.	Chris and Gwyneth	37.3%
b.	Joel and Hilary	14.4%
c.	Jack and Karen	13.6%
d.	Britney and Kevin	12%
e.	Pete and Kate	11.7%
f.	Bobby and Whitney	11%

To reader Joely Bond of Washington, D.C., who claims her "booty looks better than those couples," we say only this: Huh?

10 BEST "TRAPPED IN THE CLOSET" CHAPTER

Before stooping to incontinent midgets, R&B's preeminent mini-opera promised something resembling intrigue. Apologies to Rachael of Centreville, Virginia, who says, "I never read it, so how should I know the best chapter?"

11
MOST AFRO-TASTIC AFRO

a.	Phil Spector	31.6%
b.	Omar Rodriguez-Lopez (The Mars Volta)	26.4%
c.	Claudio Sanchez (Coheed and Cambria)	22.6%
d.	Steve Bays (Hot Hot Heat)	20.4%

"Wall of sound?" More like "wall of crazy-ass curls!" The legendary, and possibly murderous, record producer wins by a hair.

12
CRAFTIEST CELEBRITY DEFENSE ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR

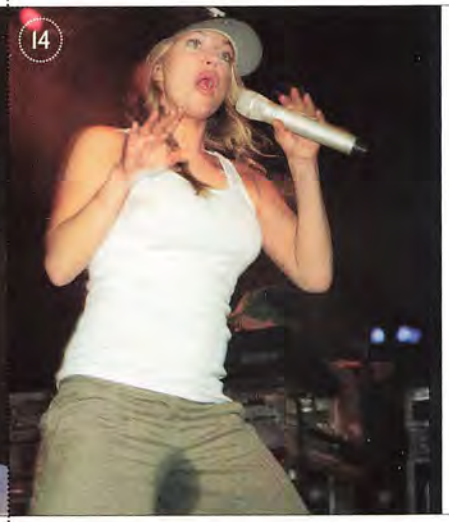
a.	Thomas Mesereau Jr. (Michael Jackson)	72.2%
b.	Ed Genson (R. Kelly)	12.6%
c.	Leslie Abramson (Phil Spector)	7.9%
d.	Eamonn Sherry (Pete Doherty)	7.3%

The most lopsided victory in this year's poll goes to the silver-haired, silver-tongued genius who convinced a jury that the proprietor of Neverland Ranch is not, in fact, a kiddie-fiddler. Johnnie Cochran smiles down from heaven.

13
EVENT OF THE YEAR

a.	Live 8	55.2%
b.	ReAct Now (VH1/MTV/CMT Katrina relief show)	24.4%
c.	Coachella music festival	11.3%
d.	The birth of Sean Preston Federline	9.1%

So, an unprecedented global gathering of musical talent designed to relieve third-world nations of crippling debt was somehow more culturally significant than K-Fed's supersperm finding another target? Whatever, hippies.



14
MOST LIKELY TO PISS THEMSELVES ONSTAGE IN 2006

a.	Fergie (again)	42.8%
b.	Ozzy Osbourne	33.3%
c.	Keith Richards	15.9%
d.	Mick Mars	6.8%

Votes streamed in for the Black Eyed Pee, while Zack Elias of Edmonton in the great state of Canada is partial to serial urinator R. Kelly.

15
MOST INAPPROPRIATE PUBLIC DISPLAY

a.	Corey Clark ratting out Paula Abdul on *20/20*	32%
b.	Courtney Love at the Pamela Anderson roast	30%
c.	Black Eyed Peas "singing" about TV shows at the Emmys	19.3%
d.	Diddy krumping at the MTV Awards	18.7%

"You should have included Hilary Duff and Joel Madden's entire relationship," writes Quinn Santo of New Boston, Michigan. "He was something like 25 and she was 16 when they started dating—if that doesn't scream 'pedophile,' I don't know what does."

HILTON: X17AGENCY.COM; FERGIE: CHRISTINA RADISH/LFI; MARTIN: VAL MALONE/WIREIMAGE.COM; GETTY IMAGES

16
BEST REDISCOVERED HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK PHOTO

a.	Rivers Cuomo	55.3%
b.	Billie Joe Armstrong	19.1%
c.	Kenny Chesney	16.1%
d.	Brandon Flowers	9.4%

The annual shot of the enormous-haired Weezer frontman wins in a landslide—a landslide of *rock*. Yet we fear for the health of reader Meisha Virtue, who writes, "Every time I see Billie Joe's yearbook pic, I shit my pants."

17
LEAST ANNOYING REALITY TV STAR

a.	Carrie Underwood (winner, *American Idol*)	43.3%
b.	J.D. Fortune (winner, *Rock Star: INXS*)	20.6%
c.	Kristin Cavalleri (*Laguna Beach*)	16%
d.	Melinda Stolp (*The Real World: Austin*)	16%
e.	O'so Krispie (winner, *R U the Girl?*)	4.1%

For name-awesomeness alone, J.D. Fortune and O'so Krispie, dead-person surrogates for INXS and TLC, respectively, deserve accolades.

19
GEEZER(S) OF THE YEAR

a.	The Rolling Stones	36.7%
b.	Madonna	27.7%
c.	Paul McCartney	13.4%
d.	Neil Diamond	8.7%
e.	Bruce Springsteen	8.2%
f.	Gang of Four	5.3%

They weathered countless Geritol jokes and still trotted out back-catalogue gems for hours a night. But David Slone of Warsaw, Indiana, thinks this whole category is "stupid." Gripes Old Man Slone: "Appreciate your elders because sooner rather than later, you'll all be 'geezers' too and won't find ageism cool. Grow up." No, *you* grow up.

20
VIDEOGAME OF THE YEAR

a.	*Resident Evil 4*	36.2%
b.	*Call of Duty 2*	17.6%
c.	*The Warriors*	15.4%
d.	*God of War*	14.2%
e.	*Stubbs the Zombie*	8.4%
f.	*Quake 4*	8.3%

Resident Evil 4: four times the evil residents!

21
COMMERCIAL SELLOUT THAT WAS ACTUALLY KINDA COOL

a.	Gorillaz, "Feel Good Inc." (iPod)	35.4%
b.	Franz Ferdinand, "Take Me Out" (Sony PSP)	30.7%
c.	The Cars, "Just What I Needed" (Circuit City)	15%
d.	M.I.A., "Galang" (Honda Civic)	10.4%
e.	Transplants, "Diamonds and Guns" (Garnier Fructis)	8.5%

We didn't get a lot of comments for this category specifically, so we'd like to use this space to quote reader Christopher Fields of Billings, Montana, who says, "*Blender* is so cool, it makes my nipples itch."

22
QUOTE OF THE YEAR

a.	"George Bush doesn't care about black people." (Kanye West)	38.9%
b.	"You wanna know how I know you're gay? You like Coldplay." (Paul Rudd in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*)	26.4%
c.	"I want to go to Egypt and Japan and open orphanages. A chain of them." (Lindsay Lohan)	14.4%
d.	"I'd like to be governor one day." (Courtney Love)	7.8%
e.	"In the future, my private life will be expressed solely through art." (Britney Spears)	6.1%
f.	"Other men have Ferraris. My bliss is giving and sharing simple and innocent fun." (Michael Jackson)	5%
g.	"The spirit inside of me is a predator of energy and balance." (Fred Durst)	1.6%

Dishonorable mention to munchies-stricken Ashlee Simpson's "Stop talking to me, bitch. I'm nice," drunkenly mumbled just as this survey went to press. [BLENDER]

18 MOVIE OF THE YEAR

23%
a. *Sin City*

21.3%
b. *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*

19.8%
c. *Wedding Crashers*

17.6%
d. *Crash*

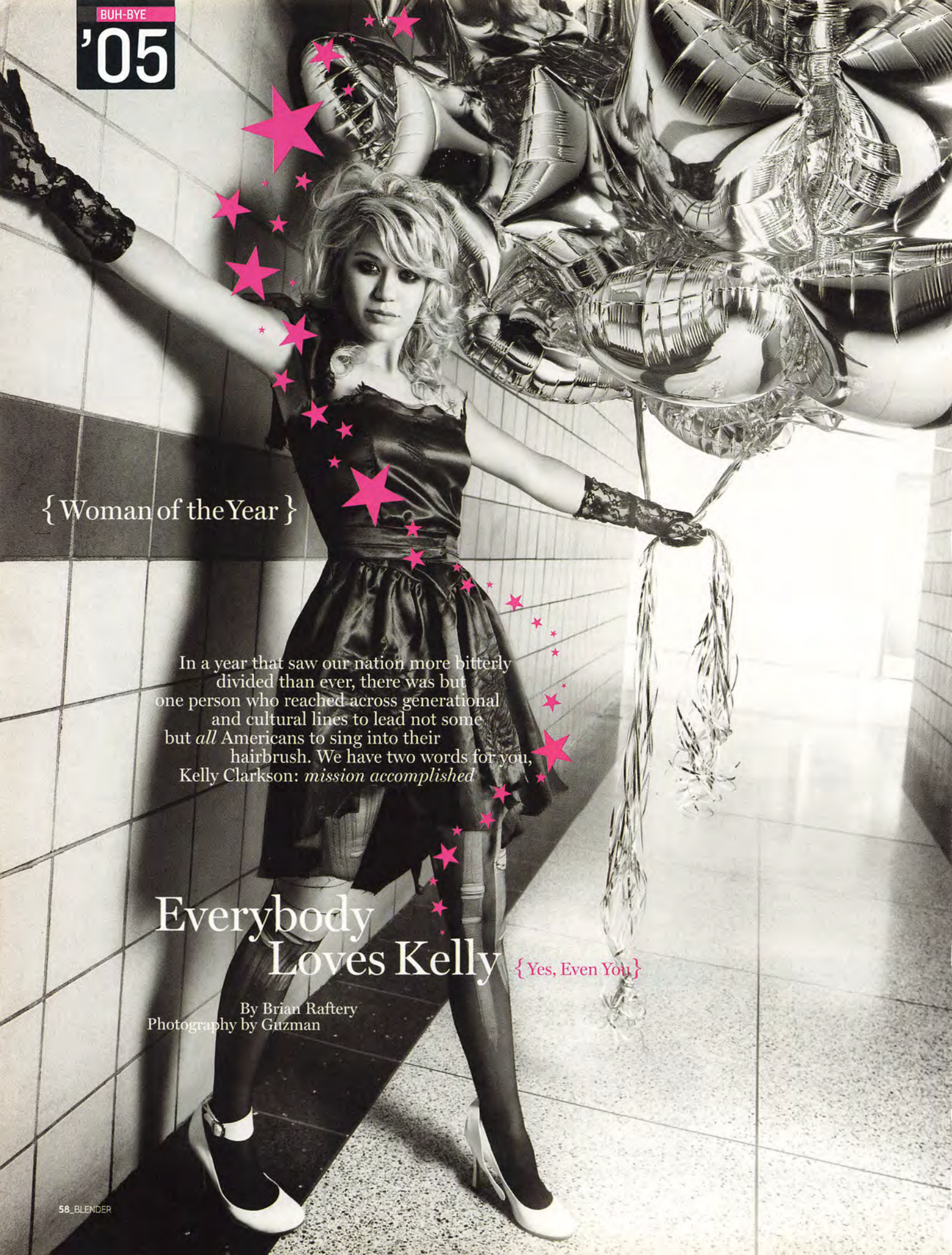
15.8%
e. *Batman Begins*

2.5%
f. *Hustle & Flow*

In a tight race, graphic castration barely edges out nuptial misadventure, once again proving that there's very little difference between the two.

Survey conducted from October through November 2005 on Blender.com.

HANOVER/UNIVERSAL; [illegible] INCLUDING CHADWICK; RICHARD CARTWRIGHT/NEW LINE PRODUCTIONS; BATMAN: DAVID JAMES; HUSTLE: ALAN SPEARMAN/CRUNK PICTURES



{ Woman of the Year }

In a year that saw our nation more bitterly divided than ever, there was but one person who reached across generational and cultural lines to lead not some but *all* Americans to sing into their hairbrush. We have two words for you, Kelly Clarkson: *mission accomplished*

Everybody Loves Kelly { Yes, Even You }

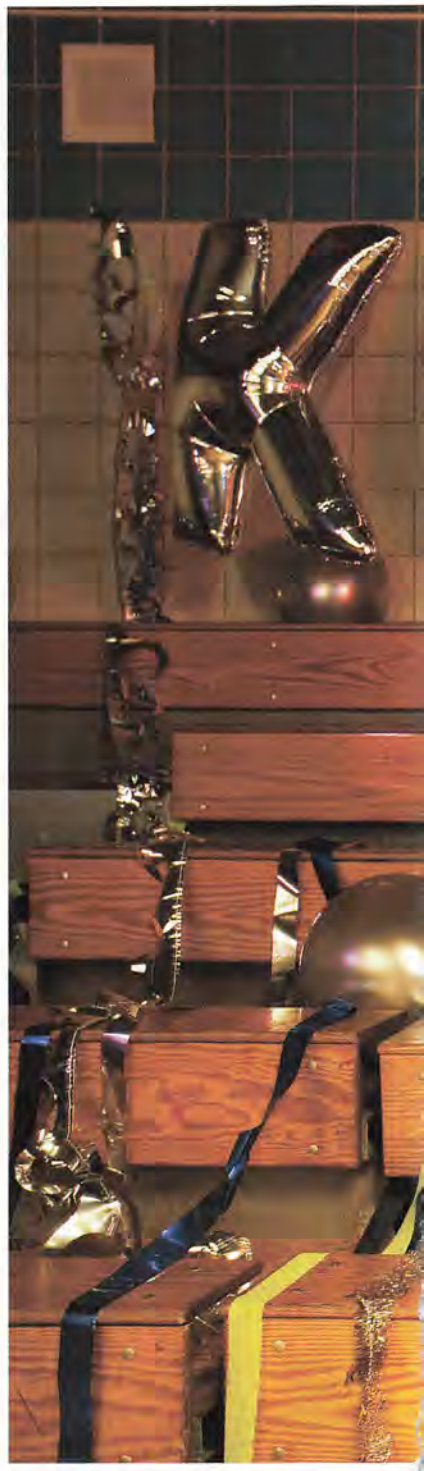
By Brian Raftery
Photography by Guzman

STYLIST: LISA VON WEISE FOR KATY BARKER AGENCY. MAKEUP: ROBERT GREENE AT SEE MANAGEMENT FOR MAC COSMETICS. SET DESIGN: MARLA WEINHOFF STUDIO. HAIR: ROLANDO BEAUCHAMP FOR BUMBLE + BUMBLE. MANICURE: CLAUDINE DUCHAMP FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PRIANO. BALLOON DECOR: BALLOONACY. SPECIAL THANKS TO WADLEIGH ARTS HIGH SCHOOL, NEW YORK CITY

DRESS FROM **SALVATION ARMY**. GLOVES BY **GIRL PROPS**. CUSTOMIZED TIGHTS BY **CALVIN KLEIN**. SHOES BY **HEATHERETTE**.

Looks like the Olsen Twins have finally met their match.

K



Kelly Clarkson has just sunk her fourth girly-flavored peach-schnapps concoction of the night when AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long" beckons from the club stereo. It's a come-hither that Clarkson can't resist: She's been sitting still for almost an hour now—having just finished a sold-out set at the Theater at Madison Square Garden—and "Shook" is her favorite song *of all time, y'all!* So she rises from her corner seat and makes the back wall of this midtown Manhattan club her imaginary grind partner, sliding the back of her gray cargo pants up and down with a mild salaciousness that, while perfectly TV-14, would probably make Clay Aiken even more red-faced than usual.

Just after Clarkson's earth stops quakin', a tall, preppily clad well-wisher leans past the human equator of handlers, friends and bandmates and ducks his head into her makeshift VIP area. "Girl," Farnsworth Bentley yells across the couch, "I just wanted to tell you that you *ripped shit up* at the VMAs!"

Clarkson nods in appreciation, as *Blender*'s 2005 Woman of the Year adds another name to her long, strange list of admirers. It's a truly disparate group, one that includes—but is clearly not limited to—teenage girls, housewives, gay men, indie rockers, Oprah, Dave Grohl, the cast of *Laguna Beach*, your mom, your fraternity brother, five million or so record buyers and at least one umbrella-designing Friend of Diddy.

"I like songs when you can actually hear the person cry. It's free therapy." ★

But wait ... Kelly Clarkson? The safe-as-milk 23-year-old Southern girl who loves Jesus Christ and Mariah Carey? In 2002, after she won the first installment of *American Idol*, Clarkson was just another barely elected, still-untested Texan, one who had made her name on a show that seemed more intent on churning out sunshiney pop-moppets than long-term stars. Now, thanks to some assertive business moves, a stock-taking personal meltdown or two and a song—"Since U Been Gone"—as catchy and globally prevalent as Asian Bird Flu, she's one of the biggest stars in the world. Even goth-metal guitar-rock dudes can't get enough of her.

"I never thought someone who came from *American Idol* would turn out to be the real deal," admits former Evanescence guitarist Ben Moody, who co-wrote two songs on 2004's *Breakaway* (and who accompanied Clarkson to a tattoo parlor, where they solidified their Lone Star State lineage in ink). "But that was just her vehicle. She used it; it didn't use her. She flipped it on its ass."

Indeed, the gum-snapping girl now singing along happily to Bell Biv DeVoe while simultaneously mixing vodka cranberries for the boys in her band and text-messaging her friends is already a tested music-biz pro. And yet, only a couple of years ago, in the very same midtown Manhattan neighborhood, at the very same late-night hour, she was having a far less celebratory big night out ...

"It was New Year's Eve 2003, and I was in New York with my family," Clarkson says in her mad-dash Texas cadence, "and I was not happy at all. [I'd been] arguing with my label and my management. I felt like I was by myself. I would be at my office and I'd be the only one there. I was 21 years old at the time—and I'm fighting my own battles? I'm not *that* good!"

Sitting backstage at the Garden a few hours before her show, waiting for her Subway wrap to arrive, Clarkson is almost dwarfed by the rider-required bag of tortilla chips on the table in front of her. She's always been a tiny little thing; even her long-sleeved black sweater—emblazoned

★ Worst. Pep rally. Ever.

with a Laverne DeFazio–style cursive "K" in the corner—has fit her perfectly for years now. Yet she pops with so much natural energy (no caffeine, no blow) one almost expects her to start shooting lightning bolts from her fingertips, à la Emperor Palpatine; this might be an unintended side-effect of spending part of her Burleson, Texas, days working as a Red Bull promoter. And nothing gets Clarkson going like her post–*American Idol* struggles with RCA Records and 19 Entertainment, the management company that first guided her career.

"She would fly me out [to visit], and I could tell she was worn out," says Ashley Donovan, one of Clarkson's best friends since they met as seventh graders at Pauline Hughes Middle School (she now works as her hair and makeup assistant). "She needed to put her foot down; she needed to surround herself with people who care about her, rather than people who wanted something from her."

It wasn't the contractual demands of *Idol* that got to her—though her new management company, industry powerhouse The Firm, can't wait until the show is eventually airbrushed out of her CV. Her main point of contention, Clarkson says, was that the record label didn't want to include Clarkson's own compositions on *Breakaway*. But the management breakup had been stirring for years: The life cycle for an *Idol* winner—tour, record, smile, repeat—had at times forced her into isolation, away from friends and family, and helped →

damage an already iffy relationship with her now-ex. Even before her fateful New York City trip, she was getting ready to call it all off. "Any time I'd have a huge argument, I'd wind up going to [Los Angeles's] La Cienega Park," she says. "I'd call my mom bawling, because I lived with my brother and a friend, and I didn't want them to see me. It's very hard for me to let people see me suffering. I like to be strong. I like to be able to handle things."

So she phoned *Idol* creator and 19 Entertainment head Simon Fuller and gave him her New Year's resolution. "I called Simon and said, 'I think I have to leave,'" she says. "I love Simon to death, and if he could have been there every day with me, it would have worked out perfectly. But I need someone, for my sanity, to be with me every day."

To understand why Clarkson would make such a drastic—and undoubtedly risky—decision at a crucial point in her career, take a look at the lyrics for the six songs she co-wrote on *Breakaway* (they're right next to the "Thank You" section, which contains an astonishing 11 "y'all"s and 20 exclamation points). Considering that Clarkson's breakthrough hit was the prom/graduation/year-end montage theme "A Moment Like This" (from her 2003 debut, *Thankful*), *Breakaway*'s best numbers are pretty damned bleak at times. It's what makes her live shows a bit strange at times—how many other artists can get a crowd of 9-year-olds to sing along with lyrics such as "It's like you're a drug/It's like you're like a demon I can't face down"? It's part Tori Amos, part Tori Spelling.

"Jesus drank. It says in the Bible he had a glass of wine. I don't know if he actually drank it, but whatever."

"I tend to write on the darker side," she says. "I like songs when you can actually hear the person cry. It's free therapy."

Some of these tunes had been in her head since she was 16 years old; lyrics were written down whenever they came to mind, and melodies were sung into a crappy tape player. Not surprisingly, her latest *TRL* No. 1, "Because of You," finds her still stuck in her teens, dealing with her parents' divorce. It's a harsh tune—about mistrust and lingering anger—and Clarkson's mom wasn't thrilled about its inclusion.

"When I first gave it to her, she was like, 'Well, are there any problems?'" Kelly says. "Like, 'Wow—that's gonna be out on your record?' And she was OK with it, but it still kind of sits in the back of her head. We've had the conversation about 12,000 times about this song."

★ Racking up dry-cleaning bills at the 2005 VMAs.

Clarkson's had far fewer conversations about the song with her father, whom she sees less frequently. He moved away from the family when his daughter was 6, relocating to Irvine, California. "We didn't have a relationship until five years ago," Kelly says. "And that's just because his family and mine were both really poor. So it's not like we had money to visit or times to talk for hours on the phone. It's really when I moved to L.A. and he just showed up. It was weird; he's such a loving guy, but I didn't remember him, really."

Clarkson's other deal-breaking song was "Behind These Hazel Eyes," a none-too-subtle kiss-off to her ex-boyfriend: "I had literally been alone for two years, then I ended up meeting this guy. Everybody does that—you're alone, and then all of sudden you meet someone, you get excited about it, and that's what you latch on to. It's not so much the person as that experience—that life that you want. You're craving it too badly. And then when you decide that you're going to break it off, you're like, 'Oh god, I'm going to be back here alone, again.'"

So how did it end?

"Horribly," she says. "It's a shame. I'm friends with my two other ex-boyfriends, and it's a shame because we probably won't ever be to able to be."

Earlier this year, Clarkson started hanging out with 24-year-old singer Graham Colton, who was opening for her on the Behind These Hazel Eyes tour. Like Johnny and June—okay, maybe more like Gwen and Gavin—they hooked up as a couple; fittingly, in the constant run-together that is Clarkson's life, she can't quite recall how many months ago it went from friendship to courtship: "Umm ... I don't know," she says. "Maybe three? Four? I'm not that girl." She's also not the kind of girl interested in some Marc Anthony–J. Lo soap-operatic duet. "We're not like that. But we will tell each other if something's good or if it's crap."

For all of Clarkson's stepped-up songwriting on *Breakaway*, the song that essentially transformed her career—the one that stretched across demos and playlists—is one she did not write. "'Since U Been Gone' is the most pop song on my record," she says. "I thought that would be the one that people would bag me for, [because] it was kind of like "Miss Independent": People would be like, 'Oh, another pop radio song from Kelly.' I didn't see it being a hit."

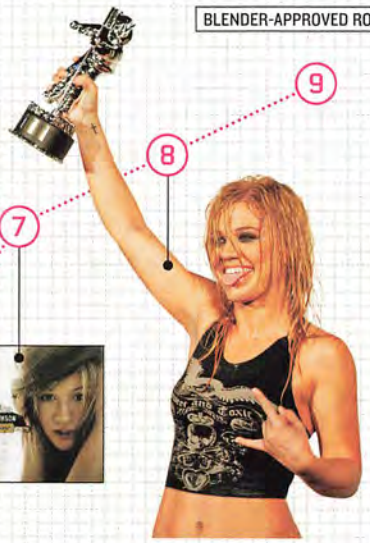
Nevertheless, in 20 years, whether she is playing arenas or working the state-fair circuit, Kelly Clarkson will be singing "Since U Been Gone." At her Garden show, Clarkson teases it out as her last pre-encore number, and when she finally hits the chorus, the floor actually starts shaking—a testament to the fact that Clarkson has started moving beyond her brace-faced *Idol* constituency and picked up an older (and presumably heavier) fanbase. A to-hell-with-it, relationship-axing adieu with a jacked-up chorus, "Gone" is an audience-altering monster of a tune, one that even got the attention of the normally pop-opposed alt-rock scene: Ted Leo covered it, Bob Mould snuck it into his DJ set and former Soul Coughing frontman M. Doughty enthused about it on his blog.

"First of all it's just a great, classic single," Doughty says. "And she's got one of those voices—it's like a higher version of a trombone: No vibrato. Super-strong. Pure Texas. You don't really hear a lot of →

KEVIN KANE/WIREIMAGE.COM

Since He's Been Gone

Our carefully calculated Fame-o-Meter scientastically charts how an American Idol became America's Sweetheart, and a poofy-haired near-idol, um, didn't



BLENDER-APPROVED ROYALTY

TOTAL OBSCURITY

1 JUSTIN

1 KELLY

2002 2003 2004 2005

1

KELLY CLARKSON returns to her native Texas after a fire in her L.A. apartment destroys everything she owns. Dejected, she works as a movie theater usher and a waitress at a comedy club.

JUSTIN GUARINI moves to New York to realize his Broadway dreams. While performing at bar mitzvahs, Justin lands a part in *The Lion King*.

2

Viewers name KELLY the first *American Idol*, with JUSTIN coming in runner-up. Both are signed by RCA.

3

KELLY releases her debut album, *Thankful*, selling 279,000 copies in its first week, and 2.3 million copies to date.

JUSTIN releases *Justin Guarini*, which sells a disappointing 142,000 copies.

4

While boating on a lake in Grand Prairie, Texas, with Guarini and friends, KELLY is gently reprimanded after the boat runs ashore and nearly hits a 5-year-old. She is not ticketed.

JUSTIN—the boat's driver—is cited for "unsafe boat operation" and fined.

5

From Justin to Kelly opens nationwide, much to the chagrin of the American populace, and costs 20th Century Fox almost $18 million in losses.

6

KELLY is nominated for the American Music Awards "Favorite New Artist" award.

JUSTIN is dropped from recording label RCA.

7

KELLY begins recording her album *Breakaway*, which will sell 3.4 million copies.

JUSTIN appears on five episodes of *Hollywood Squares*.

8

KELLY gives a show-stopping performance at the MTV Video Music Awards, and picks up two awards—Best Female Video and Best Pop Video—for "Since U Been Gone."

JUSTIN participates in a charity softball game as one of two featured celebrities, the other a little-known *Survivor* from the first season.

9

KELLY is named *Blender*'s Woman of the Year and appears on the January 2006 cover.

JUSTIN is reportedly spotted at the DMV in California, getting his car inspected.

LAUREN HARRIS

GUARINI (TOP): HENRY MCGEE/GLOBE PHOTOS; CLARKSON & GUARINI: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE.COM; CLARKSON WITH AWARD: MARIO ANZUONI/CORBIS; FILM POSTER: EVERETT COLLECTION; BOAT: MATRIX/RALIER-GRIFFIN.COM; GUARINI (BOTTOM): DON MURRAY/GETTY IMAGES

voices like that in pop music; we're used to those little-girl voices that the former Mouseketeers have."

Not surprisingly, the song almost went the Disney route. "We were listening to the Strokes and the Hives, some emo stuff," remembers Lukasz "Dr. Luke" Gottwald, who, along with boy-band hitmaker Max Martin, co-wrote "Since U Been Gone." "And we were like, 'God, we love this shit. But why can't they write a hit song?' Don't you just wish a Strokes song went to where you wanted it to go?"

While they were writing "Gone," Martin and Gottwald had Pink in mind, and even Hilary Duff's team was eyeing it before they passed (as Gottwald points out, she just didn't have the voice to hit the higher notes). Clarkson wasn't on their list of candidates. "Honestly, I don't think Max even knew who Kelly was," Gottwald says. "He lives in Sweden, and he didn't follow *American Idol*." Luckily, Clarkson's A&R rep intervened, and now she has her own "You Shook Me All Night Long."

"I went to see Foo Fighters when I was off in Texas," Clarkson says, "and the first thing Dave Grohl said to me was 'I love that song!' I am puzzled each time. The indie guys are usually like, 'Pop, schmop.'"

As Clarkson's popularity swells, so do the demands for her time. Earlier this year, she took her first full vacation in three years, heading back to Fort Worth to work on her new house—"It's a very Victorian, *Gone With the Wind* kind of thing," she says—and was inundated with friends and relatives she hadn't seen in forever. Clarkson's not complaining, but the three-and-a-half-week trip wasn't quite the relaxing getaway she had in mind. Friends threw parties in her pad when she wasn't around, and the phone rang nonstop. "I've been around someone every day—I haven't been alone for the last three and a half years," she says. "So I just wanted to chill. That was a little difficult for people to swallow. They were like, 'I can't believe she doesn't want to hang out.' And I just [wanted] to sit and watch a movie."

"Naked women are beautiful—when it's tastefully done. A hot video? That's awesome."

★ Top: With proud mama after the 2004 Grammys. Bottom: *Idol* runners-up feign graciousness, lack of bloodcurdling envy.

But there is little alone time anymore, whether she's at home or in public. Appearing on *Idol* yields a strange strain of celebrity ownership; after spending weeks voting for Clarkson, some fans likely got a sense of possessiveness—that feeling of "I made you famous. You owe me. Sign this homemade sweatshirt." Wherever she goes, she is overrun by admirers, often teenage girls or twentysomething gay men, both of whom are nearly asthmatic with excitement. She tries to sign everything put in front of her, and seems genuinely guilt-ridden when she has to stop.

"She just goes tirelessly," notes David Hodges, another Evanescence-member-turned-co-writer. "I think it's because she's a fan of music, and she loves the fact that people connect with her music and so she wants to give back. She's insane with that stuff—almost to a fault, because it becomes really emotionally draining after a while. You gotta pull her into the car, because she'll keep waving and signing."

And then there's the assault of corporate schmoozing. The backstage area at the Garden has dozens of tiny, multipurpose little rooms to hide out in, but as Clarkson darts around the perimeter after her 75-minute performance—sponsored by a large cellphone company—there is no place to hide. Around every corner she turns, there are people waiting for her—some fans, some contest-winners, some a bit dubious. And so, she will meet. She will greet. And she will sign more glossies and pose for more pictures than Tara Reid at a Señor Frog's beer-bong convention.

Even after the room clears out and Clarkson hands over her Sharpie, she's still not finished. One of her label reps has a few more programs that need her stamp, and even though Clarkson must be into the third stage of carpal tunnel syndrome by now, they will be signed: "I'll move her limp wrist," he says, only half-jokingly.

After the required promo rounds are finished, Clarkson makes one more stop into her dressing room, swiftly assembles a peanut butter and marshmallow sandwich, and heads out into the street, where, true to Hodges' word, she essentially needs to be guided into her car to get away from the fans waiting for her. The last thing *Blender* hears before the door closes: "Kelly, read this—I wrote it about you!"

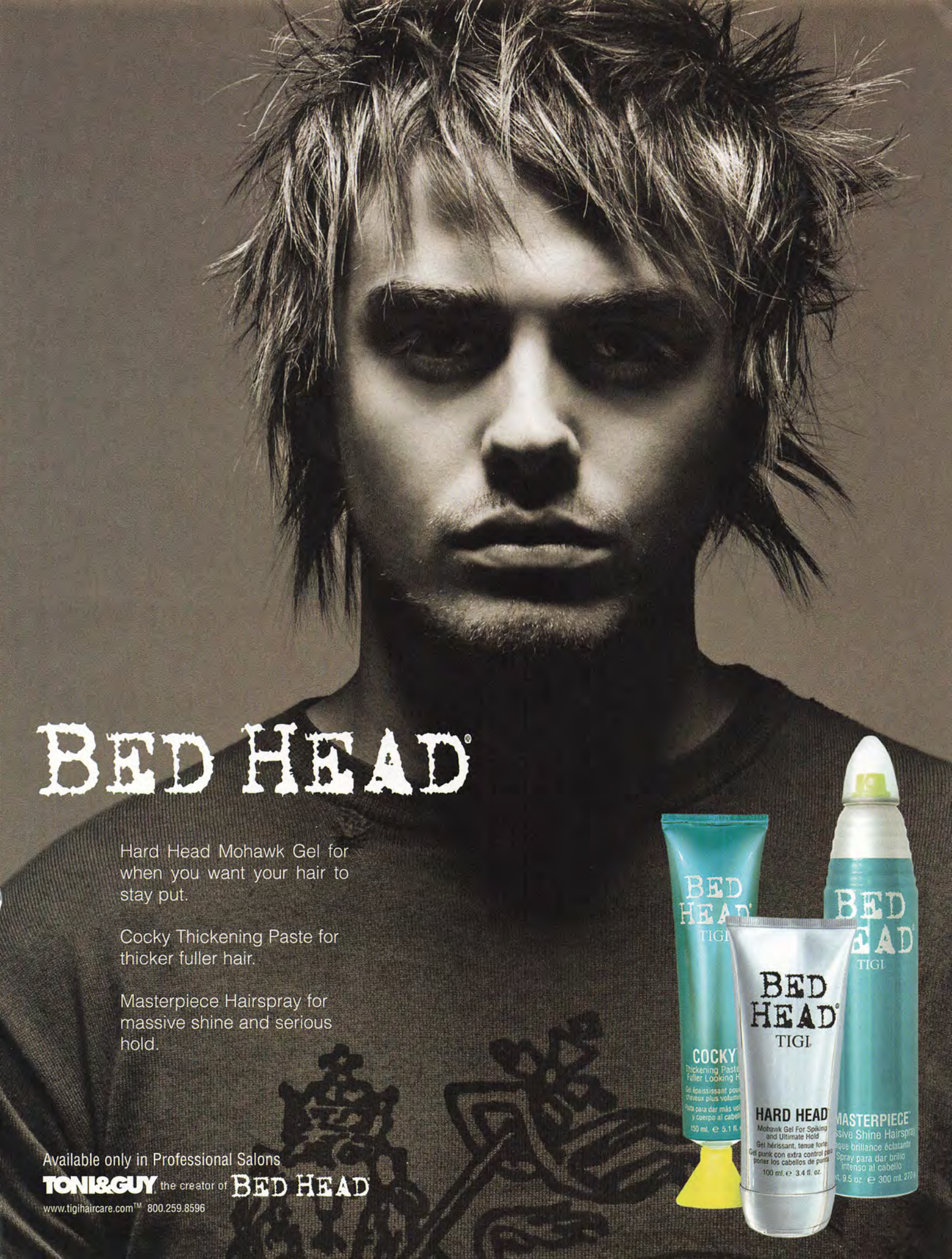
There's an afterparty tonight, but all Clarkson wants to do is sleep: "I just want to go for 15 minutes and then go to bed."

An hour later, Clarkson has convinced the club's DJ to put on some Mary J. Blige, and the empty glasses are piling up in front of her. "I don't sweat it," she says. "Jesus drank. It came straight from the Bible that he had a glass of wine. Actually, I don't know if it says he actually drank it, but whatever."

Clarkson may be a Christian—"I've always grown up pretty close to church and with God," she told Christian pop magazine *CCM*—but she's no holy roller; she'll get her drink on, and when it comes to baring a little skin, she's not entirely opposed to it—in a certain context. Posing scantily as Kelly Clarkson, the person? Not gonna happen. "It's just not who I am," she says. But as a character, perhaps—well, that's another story. "I think naked women are beautiful creatures—when it's tastefully done. Christina Aguilera's 'Dirrty' video? I wouldn't mind doing that. A hot video? That's awesome. Eight seconds of how you felt at a club one time when you're dancing around? Everybody feels that."

There are no sexed-up dancefloor antics tonight, however—Clarkson's not in character, and a couple of AC/DC shake-alongs don't count. Instead, after a few more minutes of DJ-induced giddiness, Clarkson moves back into the streets of midtown Manhattan and into her waiting SUV. She bids *Blender* goodnight, but as the doors are closing shut, an unmistakable (and slightly tipsy) voice pipes out of the backseat: "I don't know, maybe we should go out to one more place? C'mon, y'all!" [BLENDER]

TOP: RENA DURHAM/PAPARAZZI.COM; BOTTOM: FRED PROUSER/REUTERS/CORBIS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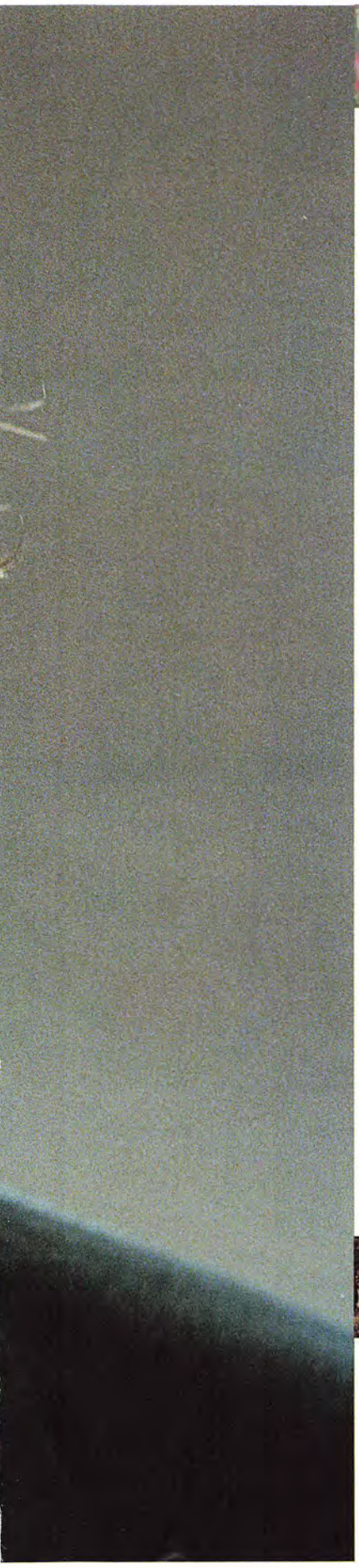
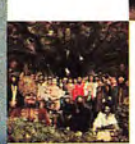
ANTHONY MANDLER/CORBIS OUTLINE; OPPOSITE: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM

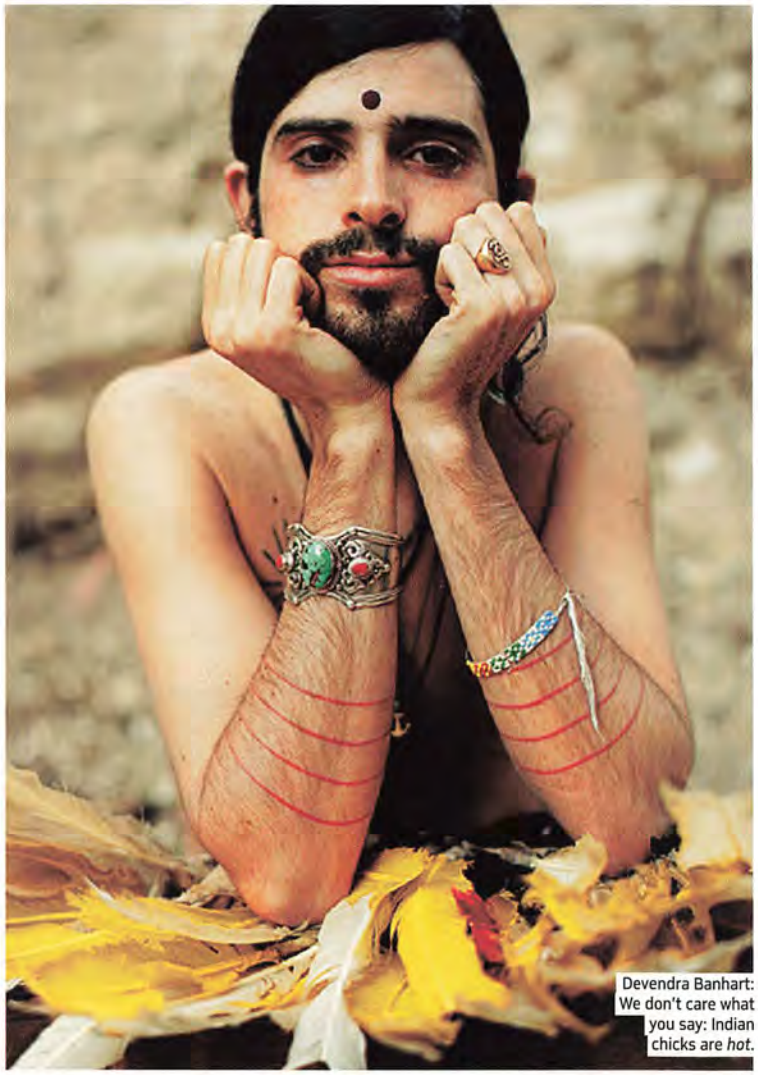




BY CLARK COLLIS // JOSH EELLS // WILL HERMES // HUA HSU // STEVE KANDELL // JONAH WEINER

THE 50 GREATEST CDS OF 2005

FROM MARIAH TO THE MARS VOLTA TO M.I.A., 2005 WAS A FANTASTIC YEAR FOR MUSIC—AND THAT'S JUST THE "M"S! BUT ONLY THE VERY FINEST RELEASES MADE IT ONTO *BLENDER*'S ALPHABET-SPANNING TOP 50



Devendra Banhart: We don't care what you say: Indian chicks are *hot*.

50
LIZ PHAIR
SOMEBODY'S MIRACLE *CAPITOL*
The ex-indie queen goes all Wisteria Lane, singing about doomed affairs and being desperate for love.

49
DEVENDRA BANHART
CRIPPLE CROW *XL*
Beautiful, hairy, weird-ass folkie sings beautiful, hairy, weird-ass folk about beards, trees and children.

48
AMY RIGBY
LITTLE FUGITIVE *SIGNATURE SOUNDS*
Roots-rock underdog makes mid-life romance sound as exciting as teenage one-night stands.

47
R. KELLY
TP.3 RELOADED *JIVE*
Troubled Chicago soul man continues his improbable comeback with an album full of sex in strange places.

46
BOBBY PINSON
MAN LIKE ME
RCA
Roughneck Texas country about growing up in a one-stoplight town and dying to get the hell out.

45
LIGHTNING BOLT
HYPERMAGIC MOUNTAIN *LOAD*
Monstrous Rhode Island noise-metal duo—also known as *When Art School Students Attack*.

44
KAISER CHIEFS
EMPLOYMENT
UNIVERSAL
More proof that the U.K. consists of nothing but white boys with better haircuts and dance moves than you.

43
KEYSHIA COLE
THE WAY IT IS
A&M
World-weary dis tracks from a 22-year-old R&B rookie with Kanye in her corner.

42
MY MORNING JACKET
Z *ATO/RCA*
Slimmed-down and synthed-up, the jammy Kentuckians' fourth LP is their finest yet.

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR!

BUN B

HOUSTON O.G. WHO CANNOT ABIDE THOSE GALLAGHER BROS.

Best song I heard this year
"Still Tippin'" by Mike Jones. It kicked the doors open for Houston artists, including me: I'm going to make a whole lot of money thanks to that song.

My favorite new toy
The iPod Nano. The surface is already scratched the fuck up, and it won't stay charged, but you can't beat it for size and memory.

Favorite word or phrase of 2005
Young Jeezy's "Yeeeaaah!" It sounds like Igor from *Frankenstein*, about to get into some shit.

Fill in the blank: George W. Bush doesn't care about _____
Lower-class citizens. It's not about race: You had white people floating in that motherfucking shit, too.

Band you'd most like to see replace their singer on national TV
Oasis. The Gallagher brothers are assholes. A coatrack would be better entertainment.

Tom Cruise: Crazy, brainwashed, bullying cult freak or all-seeing, all-knowing seventh-level Thetan?
I'd say he's as out of his shit as L. Ron Hubbard—but at least L. Ron knew it was a fucking fix.

Ambition for 2006
Freeing [UGK partner] Pimp C. He comes up for parole later this year.

We don't want none unless it's got Bun, hon.

41
KEREN ANN
NOLITA *METRO BLUE*
A love letter to New York from an Israeli-Dutch singer-songwriter who lives in Paris. U.N. holla!

40
BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE
BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE *ARTS & CRAFTS*
Like 12 guitarists, two trumpeters and one kitchen-sinkist.

39
CLIPSE
WE GOT IT 4 CHEAP, VOL. 2 *MIXUNIT.COM*
The Virginia duo drop 2005's finest mixtape, full of exquisite beat-jacking and vicious drug-game raps.

38
HOT HOT HEAT
ELEVATOR *SIRE*
Wisecracking hipsters from Canada's west coast come pogoing back for more songs about mean girls.

BANHART: AUTUMN DE WILDE; BUN B: JACK THOMPSON

37
SUFJAN STEVENS
ILLINOIS *ASTHMATIC KITTY*
Feel-great indie-pop—but what can he possibly say about New Mexico? Check back with us in 48 years.

36
THE DARKNESS
ONE WAY TICKET TO HELL ... AND BACK *ATLANTIC*
Back with 65% more falsetto, 100% more pan flute and 5,000% more cock.

35
KINGS OF LEON
AHA SHAKE HEARTBREAK *RCA*
Jaded Nashville hipsters ask, "Is there anything more to life than supermodels and good drugs?"

34
DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
PLANS *ATLANTIC*
The lush, poignant sound of an overarticulate indie-rock dude pining for indie-rock hotties.

33
SYSTEM OF A DOWN
HYPNOTIZE *COLUMBIA*
A pipe-bomb of a record, full of whipsaw riffs, barbed sloganeering and intimidating facial hair.

32
THE MAGIC NUMBERS
THE MAGIC NUMBERS *CAPITOL*
Four rotund English hippies hit the wayback machine.

31
AMADOU & MARIAM
DIMANCHE A BAMAKO *NONESUCH*
A blind Malian couple plead for world peace over disco, rock and spindly Afrobeat riffs.

30
COHEED AND CAMBRIA
GOOD APOLLO ... *COLUMBIA*
Cast level-seven emo wizardry! Activate falsetto! Thunderous prog riffs, attack!

29
SLEATER-KINNEY
THE WOODS *SUB POP*
The Olympia indie trio whip up an orgy of feedback and blood-curdling shrieks about relationships gone, or going, horribly wrong.

28
GARY ALLAN
TOUGH ALL OVER *MCA NASHVILLE*
From the dusty-voiced California cowboy, a devastating tribute to the wife who passed away last year.

27
GIANT DRAG
HEARTS AND UNICORNS *KICKBALL/INTERSCOPE*
L.A.'s deceptively cute boy-girl duo play precious pop about how much they hate you.

26
NEIL YOUNG
PRAIRIE WIND *REPRISE*
Shakey curls up with some soft-stirred, soft-sung country rock—but his lyrics are anything but calming.

HOT HOT HEAT: MATTHIAS CLAMER/CORBIS OUTLINE; GIANT DRAG: PIETER M. VAN HATTEN/VSTALUX

Hot Hot Heat: "Yes, I *do* think it's too late to call AAA."

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR!

ANNIE HARDY {GIANT DRAG}

THREESOME-COVETING INDIE PRINCESS

Best song I heard this year
"Gold Digger" by Kanye West. For sure. Kanye's the shit.

Saddest celebrity breakup
Brad and Jen was a shock at first. But Brad Pitt's too hot for Jennifer. I'd like to see Jack White break up with his new wife. I don't think they make a good couple. I didn't see him as the supermodel type. I thought he was cooler than that.

Girl crush of the year
Well, *last* year it was Avril Lavigne, but I always have a crush on Kirsten Dunst. I love her teeth. They're, like, fucked up. But so cute!

Best sex I've had this year
I haven't had any of that, sorry to say. I need to gain some weight. Get some T&A back. But I heard Kirsten Dunst likes three-ways. Me, her and Jake Gyllenhaal!

Fill in the blank: George W. Bush doesn't care about __?
All people. He seems like a real ding-a-ling.

Obsession of the year
America's Next Top Model. Who doesn't want to watch a bunch of hopeful models have nervous breakdowns on national television?

Band I'd most like to see replace their singer on national TV
Maybe one whose singer didn't die in some horrible way.

Tom Cruise: Crazy, brainwashed, bullying cult freak or all-seeing, all-knowing seventh-level Thetan?
I think he's fucking insane. Somebody needs to slap Katie Holmes across the face and say, "Maybe you wanted to marry *Risky Business* Tom Cruise. But you don't want to marry Scientologist Tom Cruise." And I think their baby's gonna be a mutant dolphin or something.

Word or phrase of the year
"I want that."

Biggest disappointment of the year
Probably the people around me.

Giant Drag's Annie Hardy: unpopular at kissing booths.

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR!

BEN GIBBARD {DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE}

SO SENSITIVE, HE COULDN'T WAIT TO TELL US ABOUT HIS MAN-CRUSH

Best song I downloaded this year
Stars, "Your Ex-Lover Is Dead"

Trend I'm most sick of
I've heard enough disco punk in the past year to last me the rest of my life.

Favorite new toy
I just bought a folding bike recently to stash in the bay of our tour bus to ride during days off. It's ridiculous looking, but that's part of the appeal.

Favorite phrase of 2005
"Hey, brother." That's Buster from *Arrested Development*.

Saddest celebrity breakup
I'm excited about this Nick and Jessica thing right now—the facade has finally been ripped down and it's good to know that these people are human. Maybe.

Band you'd most like to see replace their singer on a reality show
It should be someone whose name is actually the band. Like the Dave Matthews Band—it's the next logical extreme.

Rock star moment of the year
Playing a really bad show for MTV with Nickelback, Sean Paul and Mary J. Blige—we had to walk this red carpet in front of these kids who are paid to act excited and be interviewed by someone from *Extra* who never heard of us.

Man-crush of the year
The Korean guy, Jin, from *Lost*—he has the most striking features I've seen in a long time. His cheekbones are phenomenal.

Best sex of 2005
At Dickinson College during a show, by two kids. We found the condom on the floor afterwards. Or maybe that's the worst sex of the year.

Aw, look, the Children of the Corn are all grown up!

25
BUN B
TRILL *RAP-A-LOT*

Like Hideki Matsui: a crafty veteran makes his belated rookie bow

2005 was the year Houston's rap scene seeped on to national radars, filling MTV with slow-mo tempos and heartfelt odes to vintage Cadillacs. But the best H-Town album came courtesy of a man who's been on the scene for decades. On his solo debut, Bun B hustles the kind of street-vérité drug tales that made his duo, UGK, regional heroes and gangsta-rap visionaries. A fleet of younger Southern boys (Ludacris, Mike Jones, Young Jeezy) and long-time homeys (Jay-Z, Scarface) ride shotgun.

24
THE HOLD STEADY
SEPARATION SUNDAY *FRENCH KISS*

Brooklyn dickhead declaims some of the best lyrics in rock

Did you ever wish classic rock was about upper Midwestern suburban drug fiends with ball-point tattoos and not-quite-numb hearts, who are haunted by Jesus Christ and obsessed with Kate Bush but hate new wave? Well, Craig Finn obviously did, and so he made his wish come true on a record that rocks like a hurricane while spinning gnarly stories that don't sound entirely made up. America's most literary bar band, hands down.

23
THE ROLLING STONES
A BIGGER BANG *VIRGIN*

Leathery geezers get their ya-ya's out

The World's Greatest Rock & Roll Band may have seen better and less wrinkly days, but their gazillionth album is their best in nearly two decades. Here, the Stones reach back to the rustic country and blues that distinguished their early-'70s classics, writing tunes rich with the dodgy humor and righteousness that come with age. They're finally settling into their perch as rock's reigning dirty old men.

22
CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH
CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH *CLAPYOURHANDSSAYYEAH.COM*

And they're not even Canadian!

This buzzy crew were the blog success story of 2005, selling 25,000 copies of their home-made debut out of singer Alec Ounsworth's Brooklyn apartment. Named after a stray bit of graffiti, CYHSY (that's what the cool kids call 'em) dreamed up a hipster Neverland full of chewy riffs, catchy melodies and lyrics about war and blood and falling behind in the rent, winning over tastemakers like Davids Byrne and Bowie along the way.

21
THE GAME
THE DOCUMENTARY *AFTERMATH/G-UNIT/ INTERSCOPE*

Bloody opening shot from a Cali MC who sees dead people

Call it *The Ghost Whisperer: Compton Edition*. On his debut, 26-year-old Jayceon Taylor references rap's fallen heroes nearly to the point of obsession. Of course, if you'd survived five slugs to the chest, arms and legs and a three-day coma, you might be preoccupied with death too. Featuring impeccable beats from Dre, Kanye and Timbaland and rhymes by Game's homey-turned-nemesis-turned-who-knows-what, 50 Cent.

20
SPOON
GIMME FICTION *MERGE*

More slacker greatness from the perennial Next Big Things

There comes a time when most every indie band has to throw in the towel and head back to grad school. Just don't tell Spoon. The quirky Austin outfit, led by stuffy-voiced frontman Britt Daniel, have been plugging away in semi-obscurity for more than 10 years; their fifth album glides along on hooky charm and the bittersweet knowledge that this is as good as it's gonna get. But it's not the sound of settling—it's the sound of settling in.

DEATH CAB: WENDY LYNCH

19
SHAKIRA
FIJACIÓN ORAL VOL. 1 *EPIC*

Pop's best argument for globalization looks good in a bikini too

Donde hay amor, goes the old Spanish proverb, *hay dolor*: Where there's love, there's pain. On the *español* half of her bilingual two-CD opus, the Colombian beauty oozes both, cooing and growling her way through one broken heart after another. Shaki originally set out to make a new wave record, then changed her mind halfway through; the result is a delightful mishmash in which breezy bossa nova nestles alongside spiky synth pop and French cabaret curls up with reggaeton.

18
LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

DFA/EMI

Rock & roll disco for the beautiful people, sung by a nebbish

James Murphy, Brooklyn dance-rock studio guru, decides to take his own stab at the semi-bigtime after creating two flabbergastingly great singles, "Losing My Edge" and "Yeah." Result: a double-disc party including both songs, the nearly-as-good "Daft Punk Is Playing at My House" and other killing jams full of twitchy synth noises and hand claps. Plus, the man clearly understands the importance of a well-placed cowbell whack.

17
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
DEVILS & DUST

COLUMBIA

Desparing music for despairing times

Following the empathic uplift of *The Rising* with somber folkie uncertainty, Springsteen mirrored the feelings of many Americans with a record that sounded more like Steve Earle than the Boss; not a bad thing. Between the title track—the year's most nuanced anti-war song—and "Reno," in which the author of "Born to Run" sings bleakly of a hooker pricing out anal sex, the dude made a quietly brave record for blustering times.

16
JUELZ SANTANA
WHAT THE GAME'S BEEN MISSING!

DIPLOMATS/DEF JAM

Crack meets girl groups on a Harlem mixtape hero's breakout CD

The chief lieutenant in Cam'ron's Diplomats crew, Santana raps like a jammed semi-automatic, barking his rhymes in clipped, staccato bursts. "Clockwork," a metaphor for drug-selling *and* booty-shaking, unfolds over a booming, click-clacking beat that sounds like the inside of Big Ben, while "There It Go (The Whistle Song)" features the best tweet-tweeting hook since the Seven Dwarfs were pushing weight.

15
THE GO! TEAM
THUNDER, LIGHTNING, STRIKE

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES/ COLUMBIA

Irresistible hypercuteness from polyglot Brits

It all could have gone horribly wrong for this British glee squad whose sample-obsessive sound and slapstick wit could have easily dipped into "annoyingly perky" territory. Luckily, this sextet's slim, short-attention-span debut always keeps you guessing, skillfully darting from gritty funk to dreamy pop to old-school raps (courtesy of future star Ninja), and keeping even the most jaded listeners continually off-balance.

14
50 CENT
THE MASSACRE

AFTERMATH

Who can take a gangsta manifesto and sprinkle it with *TRL* appeal? The Candy Man can!

This multimedia brand-name began his 2005 marketplace takeover with a CD that, for all its thug BS, was undeniable in terms of pop pleasure—"Candy Shop" would give even the staunchest hip-hop culture cop a crotch tingle. Then came the book, the movie and the *Special Edition* CD/DVD, forcing fans to buy the record again for the superior Mobb Deep remix of "Outta Control." Remember: It's business, never personal.

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR!

CARL NEWMAN
{THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS}

INDIE-ROCK'S REDHEADED STEPCHILD

Best song I downloaded this year
Sufjan Stevens, "Chicago"

Trend I'm most sick of
Cellphone holsters—if you're not gonna pull a gun on somebody, you don't need a holster.

Fill in the blank: George Bush doesn't care about _____
White people

Saddest celebrity breakup
You have to feel for Jennifer Aniston—isn't that every woman's nightmare? To know your man is fucking the hottest woman in Hollywood? But I really thought Paris and Paris were going to last and that her days of being a stupid whore were over.

Biggest time-suck
My PlayStation 2, hands down. It's like being a crackhead.

Rock star moment of the year
We played Prospect Park in Brooklyn to 10,000 people and about five songs in, the crowd surged past this roped-off section towards the front and rushed the stage. And I thought, "Holy shit, is this our concert?"

Tom Cruise: Crazy, brainwashed, bullying cult freak or all-seeing, all-knowing seventh-level Thetan?
Yeah, the first one. I used to think Mel Gibson was the crazy one, but Tom Cruise is quickly surpassing him. There's something very menacing about him—you really get the sense Katie Holmes is a little scared.

Favorite sign of the apocalypse
Didn't all the turnpikes recently convert to EZ-Pass? That's my favorite sign—it's like, if you don't have the mark, you will not pass.

The New Pornographers: "Welcome to this special screening of *Deuce Bigalow, European Gigolo*."

NEW PORNOGRAPHERS: WENDY LYNCH

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR!

EDDIE ARGOS {ART BRUT}

ENGLAND'S ARCHDUKE OF SNARK

Best song I heard this year
"Waiting for Pete Doherty to Die," by the Indelicates. It's not mean!

Man-crush of the year
Doesn't every man in the world secretly fancy Johnny Depp? Yeah, Johnny Depp. Hello, am I still talking about that? I'm going too far. But he's a very attractive man—especially dressed up as a pirate.

Obsession of the year
Coffee and chocolate and cake. I used to eat vegetables and stuff. But, in the last year, I've just thought, fuck it.

Favorite sign of the apocalypse
My friend Dickie believes in all that. Apparently Mars is doing stuff. To be honest, I'm too busy eating cake to pay attention.

Best sex I had this year
I've got a brand-new girlfriend, so—quite clearly—with her.

Favorite prescription medication
We were in Italy and I got badly bitten by mosquitoes so I took antihistamines and painkillers and some booze and went completely mental on the airplane. And not in a cool way. Actually, antihistamines are my *least* favorite drug.

Most expensive purchase of the year
I haven't got any money! I did buy a Jonathan Richman DVD. It was only about 15 quid but the extravagant thing was that I don't actually own a DVD player. I had to carry it around in my bag hoping that I would come across one in somebody's house.

Trend I'm most sick of
The Pete Doherty thing in England was pissing me off a little bit. Every day he's on the front cover of the newspaper. "Rock Star Takes Drugs!" Amazing!

Eddie Argos prepares to give a sample.

13
THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS
TWIN CINEMA
MATADOR

Students of AM gold present their stellar master's thesis

Plenty of bands pillage the past, but this year none did it with more dark wit and musical awesomeness than these Canadian pop-rock scholars. Clearly damaged from formative years spent gorging on glossy radio pop, they speak in Top 10 code, spit out hooks like surly cartoon fish and lament their inability to do much besides recycle faux beauty. "10,000 dancing girls kicking cans across the sky, no reason why," sings Neko Case. Hey—no reason needed.

12
MARIAH CAREY
THE EMANCIPATION OF MIMI *ISLAND*

All that stuff about a butterfly coming out of its cocoon? Now it's finally true!

A couple of years ago, this smash was basically unthinkable. Mariah was pop's Courtney Love, suffering post-*Glitter* meltdowns, writing to her lambs from a rehab bed, and—if you believe Eminem—begging for booty calls. But guided by R&B whiz Jermaine Dupri, she traded stemware-shattering histrionics for velvety diva cool and scored three ginormous singles and counting. Welcome back, Mimi.

11
BECK
GUERO *INTERSCOPE*

Mr. Hansen says no to drugs, gets crunk

Reuniting with the Dust Brothers—the break-beat-drunk producers who helmed 1996's hipster-honky-hip-hop masterpiece *Odelay*—Beck ditches the teary-eyed folk-tropica-whatzitz he's been making for the last six years and gets fonky. From the blazing guitar of "E-Pro" to the macabre romance of "Girl" to the junkshop funk of "Hell Yes," Beck brings the beat back-while dropping some of the freshest, strangest rhymes of his career. (And littering his videos with L. Ron-friendly anti-drug messages.)

10
YOUNG JEEZY
LET'S GET IT: THUG MOTIVATION 101 *DEF JAM*

Atlanta newbie says yes to drugs, gets crunk

A decade ago, Snoop Dogg laid out a gangsta statement of principles: "We don't love them ho's." Here, women hardly exist, period—seems they'd just distract Jeezy from his tales of cocaine, murder, cocaine, wealth, cocaine and cocaine. Not since *Scarface* have synthesizers provided such a spooky soundtrack for drug tales, and Jeezy's weathered voice is just as menacing. Taking gangsta rap back out of da club, it's the year's best hip-hop debut.

9
THE MARS VOLTA
FRANCES THE MUTE *GSL/UNIVERSAL*

The sound of panic and hysteria, played in a 45/16 time signature

Normally, when you hear the term "progressive rock," it conjures up 13-minute suites, time-juggling guitar riffs played faster than Morse code dispatches and artfully oblique lyrics delivered in a histrionic wail. This album erases none of those stereotypes, but it adds some great new twists: Spanish shrieking, a marvelously unlikely tango break, hardcore thrashes, spooky noise interludes and a general air of apocalypse. It's one part virtuosity, two parts violence.

8
COLDPLAY
X&Y *CAPITOL*

Mr. Gwyneth returns, writes a Hallmark card for the cosmos

Chris Martin comes back as a space-age messiah presiding over some intergalactic cathedral: Every piano crescendo, arcing riff and majestic moan here comes bundled in stratospheric synth- and organ-washes. His emotions are writ cosmically large: He swears to heal a lover (leper?) on "Fix You," wails about romance in terms of tidal waves on "X&Y" and encourages leaps of faith on "Speed of Sound." This is rock melodrama at its most gorgeously affecting.

ARGOS: TIBOR BOZI/RETNA LTD.

7
ART BRUT
BANG BANG ROCK & ROLL
FIERCE PANDA

Putting the "art" in "total smartasses"

Who said irony was passé? This London quintet—who allegedly began writing songs five minutes after forming—hope to write the song that "makes Israel and Palestine get along." While their jangling art punk and dry, over-the-top wit might not make them as popular as the "Happy Birthday" song—another of their goals—Art Brut's self-referential gem was one of the most savagely witty albums of the year.

6
FRANZ FERDINAND
YOU COULD HAVE IT SO MUCH BETTER ...
DOMINO/EPIC

Like Ozzy, if he read Proust and wore Dior

This time last year, FF singer Alex Kapranos told *Blender* his iPod wouldn't stop playing Sabbath and Zeppelin. It seemed arch at the time, from a guy who sang about kissing boys and out-of-work artsos, but now not so much: On album two the Scots flesh out their grooves with beefier basslines, a Bonhamesque drum stomp and that ballsiest of rock indulgences, the piano ballad. They still sing about kissing boys, though.

5
WHITE STRIPES
GET BEHIND ME SATAN *V2*

Mr. White falls *out* of love with a girl, we reap the benefits

Rock's coolest weird band had a heck of a year. Jack got over his breakup with Renée and married a supermodel on the Amazon; Meg, meanwhile, learned how to play the drums. The upshot is *Satan*, an often inscrutable, always enthralling stunner about God, incest, celebrity, ghosts, Rita Hayworth, jealousy and doin' it froggystyle. From the whooshing metal chug of "Blue Orchid" to the delightfully funky marimba-and-piano jams, it's their boldest—and best—yet.

M.I.A.: Secretly, she absolutely hates Baile funk.

4
BRIGHT EYES
I'M WIDE AWAKE, IT'S MORNING
SADDLE CREEK

Old soul songs for a new world order

Conor Oberst has been called the voice of his generation since before he could drive. Now he's finally making good on the lofty title, with 10 stunning acoustic strummers about war, peace and other fucked-up affairs of the heart, with barely a word or note out of place. "Failure's always sounded better," he sings on closer "Road to Joy," but he knows that's not true; *Morning* is the sound of someone who has hope, in spite of himself.

3
KANYE WEST
LATE REGISTRATION
ROC-A-FELLA

The college dropout earns an honorary Ph.D.

Last year, heads doubted him; this year, the only people Kanye surprised were Mike Myers and the censors at NBC. The Chicago rapper and producer's second album was a hip-pop masterpiece of earnest strivers' anthems and we-made-it brashness. In the process, West accomplished the improbable—nabbing a *Time* cover, making Adam Levine seem cool, earning Jon Brion some street cred and ticking off the President's wife.

2
FIONA APPLE
EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE *EPIC*

The album *they* didn't want you to hear. If by "they" you mean "she"

For a while it seemed Fiona Apple was in a righteous battle, championing an album Sony deemed single-poor, then shelved. Turns out Apple, cripplingly unconfident, had stomped it herself. Re-recorded and rejiggered, this lush, pounding set finally soars into the light of day. Our hero, though, is still an epic self-saboteur of epic, obsessing over fucked-up relationships ("Tymps (The Sick in the Head Song)," "Oh Well") and revenge ("Get Him Back," "Window").

1
M.I.A.
ARULAR *XL/ INTERSCOPE*

A gorgeous Sri Lankan expat makes an escapist-realist masterpiece about dancing and death

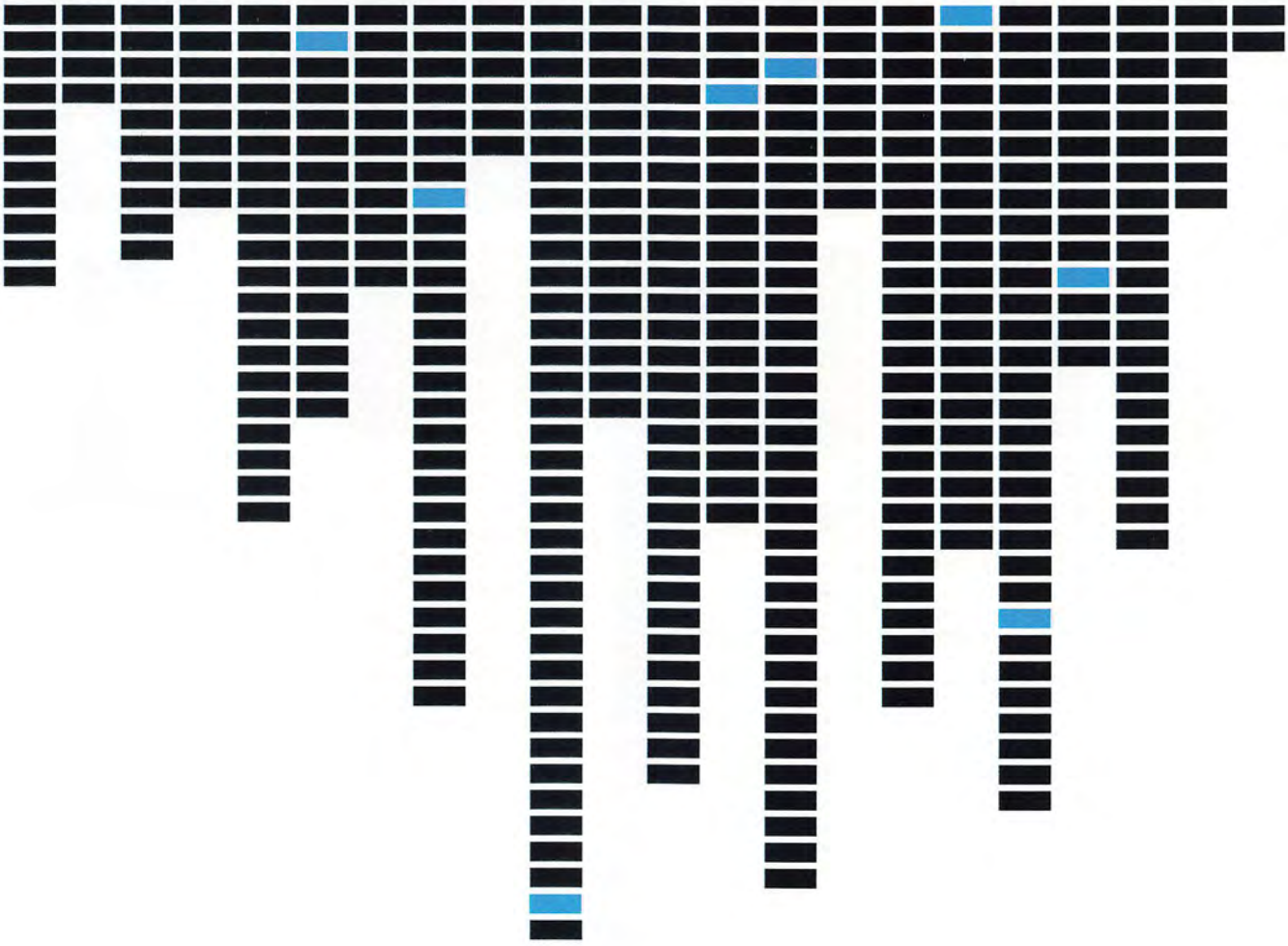
In one of the finest, strangest songs on an album with nothing but highlights, Maya Arulpragasam sings about being abducted, stuffed into a Datsun and held blindfolded in the middle of the Amazon. By song's end, though, she's sleeping with one of her kidnappers.

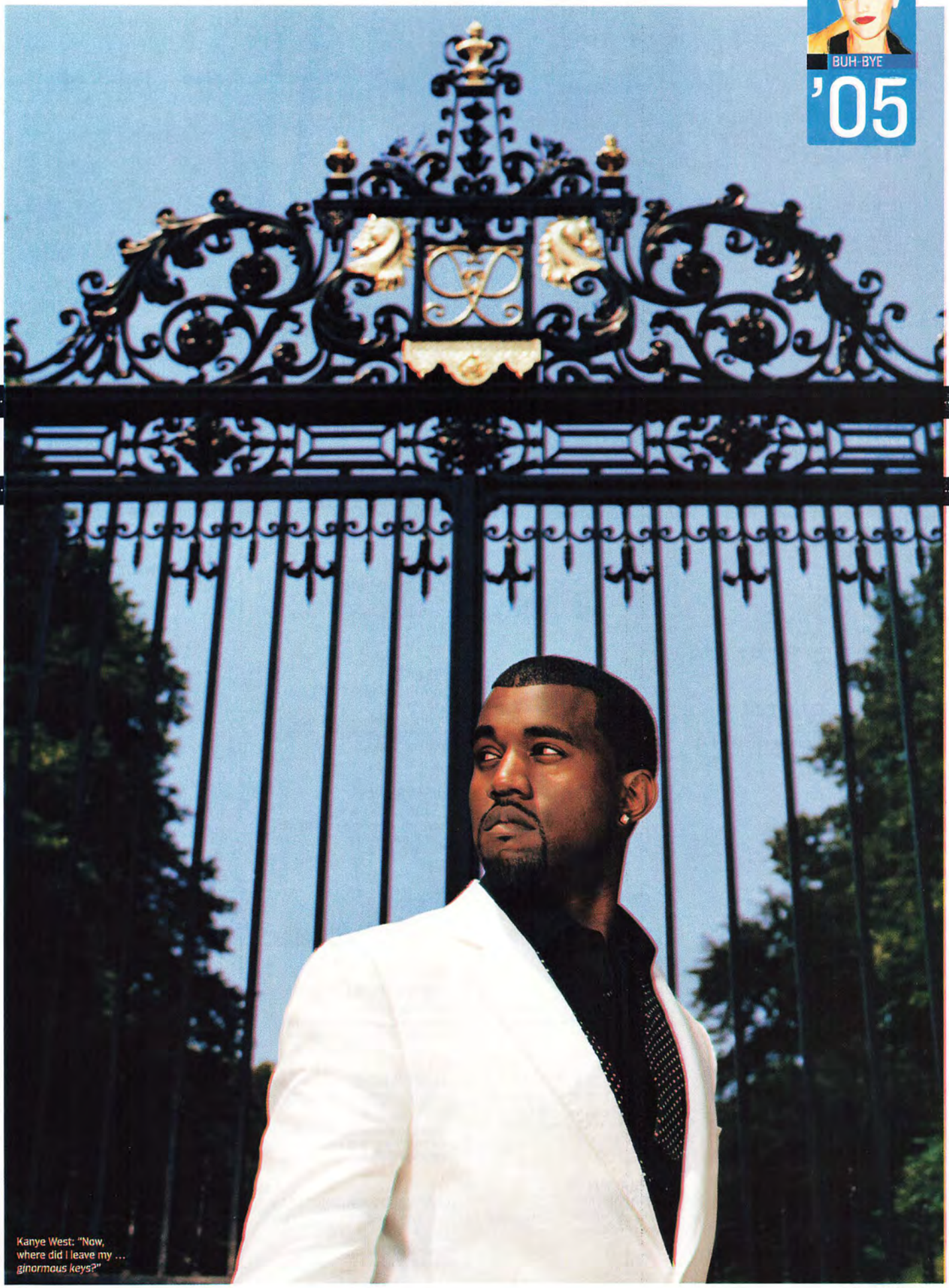
Throughout *Arular*, sex is inextricable from violence, beauty is inextricable from horror and ecstasy is inextricable from tragedy. M.I.A., a London rapper/singer who left Sri Lanka at age 11, when bloody ethnic conflict split the country, has presumably had some time to reconcile the shock of death with the necessity of celebrating life. Her lyrics—chirped, playful rhymes that juxtapose fighting and fucking, sometimes in the same line—and her music—addictive, machine-tooled party beats inspired by the sounds of Brazil, Jamaica and England's more violent slums—crackle with the electricity of contradiction. They create a world where Muslim chants rub up against nonsense party refrains, terrorists are also dads, soldiers are also sons and the rest of us carry on the business (and pleasure) of life during wartime. You can dance to it, but this ain't no disco.

M.I.A.: PEROU

FIVE-CHAPTER SAGAS ABOUT PHILANDERING GAY PASTORS? CHECK. THAT SONG FROM THE IPOD ADS? CHECK. TWO VERSIONS OF "SINCE U BEEN GONE"? DOUBLE CHECK! PLUS 96 OTHER REASONS IT'S OK IF THE ALBUM IS DEAD

THE 100 GREATEST SONGS OF 2005





Kanye West: "Now, where did I leave my ... *ginormous keys?*"

WEST: PEROU; STEFANI: JAMES DEVANEY/WIREIMAGE.COM

100
KIDZ BOP
"SINCE U BEEN GONE" *RAZOR & TIE*
The year's greatest pop song, sung by a bunch of third-graders who forgot to take their Adderall.

99
RICH BOY
"GET TO POPPIN'" *INTERSCOPE*
Timbaland debuts an Alabama protégé over a hypnotically slow-grinding African (we're pretty sure) chant.

98
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
"RENO" *COLUMBIA*
The Boss sings grimly about dead-enders and the price of anal sex.

97
KATHLEEN EDWARDS
"BACK TO ME" *ZOË/ROUNDER*
Canadian folk-rocker brags about her bewitching charms in a tone both kittenish and threatening.

96
COMMON FEAT. JOHN MAYER
"GO!" *GEFFEN*
Two mellow dudes, but one fly-ass Kanye beat.

95
ROBBIE FULKS
"FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE HOTLINE" *YEP ROC*
A power-pop parody with hooks as strong as the jokes.

94
TONY YAYO FEAT. 50 CENT
"SO SEDUCTIVE" *G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE*
50's doughy homey discusses his horniness and bedroom stamina—it's TMI you can dance to!

93
AUDIOSLAVE
"BE YOURSELF" *INTERSCOPE*
If Mr. Rogers were an ex-grunger with a badass band, this is exactly what he'd sound like.

92
PURPLE RIBBON ALL-STARS
"KRYPTONITE" *PURPLE RIBBON/VIRGIN*
Big Boi and homeys smoke some doja so strong it'd make Superman barf.

91
BRIGHT EYES
"WHEN THE PRESIDENT TALKS TO GOD" *SADDLE CREEK*
Way to go, Conor—now you'll never be nominated to the Supreme Court!

90
THE DEAD 60S
"RIOT RADIO" *EPIC*
Liverpool ska-punks rage against Radio 1 and its fraidy-cat DJs.

89
SHOUT OUT LOUDS
"THE COMEBACK" *CAPITOL*
From Swedish shoe-gazing popsters, the optimistic tale of a breakup that just won't take.

88
THE BRAVERY
"AN HONEST MISTAKE"
ISLAND

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE:
Infectious synth pop for the fauxhawk set.

SAM ENDICOTT SAYS:
"There's this girl who was one of my closest friends for years and we wound up getting together around the time things were pretty anxious in New York—terror booty, I think they called it. After everything calmed down, it became apparent that it was a giant mistake, and this song was my way of apologizing."

AMAZING FACT:
The Bravery singer says that Bernard Sumner, lead singer of synth-rock forebear New Order, recently referred to himself as "a fat, old Sam Endicott."

PHIL KNOTT/CORBIS OUTLINE

87
TEAIRRA MARÍ
"NO DADDY" *ROC-A-FELLA*
Hova's 18-year-old mini-diva holds it down for all her sisters who come from broken homes.

86
MY MORNING JACKET
"OFF THE RECORD" *ATO/RCA*
Kentucky facial-hair harvesters attempt a mellow ska-rock boogie—and actually pull it off.

85
CLIPSE
"PLAY YOUR PART" *MIXUNIT.COM*
The creepy synths and chittering drums are hip-hop at its most deliciously mean. The rhymes about destroying lives with coke? Even meaner.

84
ALL-AMERICAN REJECTS
"MOVE ALONG" *INTERSCOPE*
Attention emo brothers and sisters: Keep ya heads up.

83
MAGIC NUMBERS
"LOVE ME LIKE YOU" *CAPITOL*
How can a cry of heartache sound so exquisitely happy?

82
A BAND OF BEES
"CHICKEN PAYBACK" *ASTRALWERKS*
Bearded Englishmen give the Electric Slide a run for its bar-mitzvah-dance-floor-packing money.

81
NINE BLACK ALPS
"COSMOPOLITAN" *TINY EVIL*
Nasty taunts! Suicidal thoughts! Glossy women's magazines!

80
LUDACRIS
"NUMBER ONE SPOT" *DEF JAM SOUTH*
Luda asserts his mojo over a randy *Austin Powers*–theme sample.

79
THE LIKE
"WHAT I SAY AND WHAT I MEAN" *GEFFEN*
Three El Lay cutie-pies with music-biz pedigrees shout about the trouble with good intentions.

78
BUSTA RHYMES
"TOUCH IT" *INTERSCOPE*
Daft Punk–sampling proof that French discothèques are much, much crunkier than we thought.

77
BECK
"E-PRO" *GEFFEN*
Grungy garage-rock stomper with a na-na hook and a riff like a tidal wave.

76
JENNIFER LOPEZ
"GET RIGHT" *EPIC*
Brassy, percolating soul so cracka-dociously hot even J. Lo can't ruin it.

75
JACKIE GREENE
"HONEY I BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU" *VERVE FORECAST*
Young Sacramento songwriter invents one more sweet twist on the Dylanesque ballad.

74
CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH
"LET THE COOL GODDESS RUST AWAY" *CLAPYOURHANDSSAYYEAH.COM*
Ramshackle indie-poppers achieve a moment of oddball transcendence.

73
CHRIS BROWN FEAT. JUELZ SANTANA
"RUN IT" *JIVE*
From an Usher-inspired, Virginia-born R&B upstart comes the best contender for "Yeah! 2005"

72
GARY ALLAN
"BEST I EVER HAD" *MCA NASHVILLE*
Four minutes of undiluted heartbreak about his wife's recent suicide.

71
BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE
"7/4 (SHORELINE)" *ARTS & CRAFTS*
Much-loved Toronto collective return to make a joyous racket, chill at the beach.

70
GRETCHEN WILSON
"ALL JACKED UP" *EPIC*
Nashville's redneck queen gets wasted, crashes her truck and can't wait to do it all over again.

69
GIANT DRAG,
"KEVIN IS GAY" *KICKBALL/ INTERSCOPE*
A smartass L.A. hottie reveals the hidden truth about … Kevin Costner?

68
JUELZ SANTANA
"CLOCKWORK" *DIPLOMATS/DEF JAM*
Harlem mixtape champ rhymes about selling 'caine and makin' that booty go tick-tock.

67
OK GO
"A MILLION WAYS" *CAPITOL*
A femme fatale in fishnets sends these Chicago smart alecks reeling. The homemade video is brilliant.

Teairra Marí: "Who you callin' bitch? Oh. Right."

53

FOO FIGHTERS
"BEST OF YOU" *RCA*

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE:
Anthemic downtrodden-cheering-up rock-out beloved by ESPN music programmers.

DAVE GROHL SAYS:
"There's something about our music that is conducive to people beating the fuck out of each other on a football field. It's weird. But I find it kind of sexual, so it's nice."

AMAZING FACT:
This song almost didn't make the cut for the Foos' *In Your Honor* CD, Grohl having come to the conclusion that it was "just a U2/*War* rip-off."

66
ROBYN
"KONICHIWA BITCHES" *KONICHIWA*
In which a Swedish teen-pop also-ran transforms into a raunchy hip-pop braggart. Gangsta!

65
BUN B
"GET THROWED" *RAP-A-LOT*
Houston rap's elder statesman invites Young Jeezy and Jay-Z along for a slow-moving bragfest.

64
THE PUSSYCAT DOLLS
"DON'T CHA" *A&M*
A freaky, funky, horn-tastic tease from Hollywood's hottest C-listers.

63
THE GO! TEAM
"LADYFLASH" *COLUMBIA*
Flutes, B-boy chants and an overcaffeinated cheerleader named Ninja highlight this U.K. crew's debut jam.

62
WOLF PARADE
"YOU ARE A RUNNER AND I AM MY FATHER'S SON" *SUB POP*
Canuck clamor-popsters whomp out a massive drumbeat and some massively strange lyrics about being a fuckup like your dad.

61
THE HOLD STEADY
"YOUR LITTLE HOODRAT FRIEND" *FRENCH KISS*
Lovable blowhards swear they totally didn't hook up with that busted chick from around the way. Swear.

60
ART BRUT
"MODERN ART" *FIERCE PANDA*
English wits sing about Matisse and Hockney and wanting to rawk!

59
DAVID BANNER
"PLAY" *SRC/UNIVERSAL*
Sweaty, ultragraphic sex jam. So dirty, so icky, so … monogamous?

58
KINGS OF LEON
"THE BUCKET" *RCA*
Yee-hawing Tennessee rockers with an exhilarating ode to life on the road, premature baldness.

57
COLDPLAY
"FIX YOU" *CAPITOL*
The official love song of the International Union of Dog Neuterers.

56
GREEN DAY
"WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS" *REPRISE*
It's a lovesick weeper, an anti-war lament and a Katrina-victims tribute all rolled into one.

55
KANYE WEST FEAT. JAY-Z
"DIAMONDS FROM SIERRA LEONE (REMIX)" *ROC-A-FELLA*
Kanye deploys a 007 sample to bitch-slap De Beers, while Jigga does what he does best: rhyme about Jigga!

54
ANNIE
"CHEWING GUM" *BIG BEAT*
Norwegian disco-pop sprite loves Bazooka Joe, can't stand clingy guys.

52
LADY SOVEREIGN
"RANDOM" *CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES*
The foul-mouthed midget princess of U.K. grime rap disses J. Lo and praises chaos.

51
WHITE STRIPES
"MY DOORBELL" *V2*
A piano jaunt for anyone who's ever waited around in agony for a booty call, UPS or the fucking cable guy.

50
DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
"SOUL MEETS BODY" *ATLANTIC*
A misogynistic, 'roid-raging scream that makes you want to break shit and stomp on kittens … psych!

49
DAMIEN MARLEY
"WELCOME TO JAMROCK" *UNIVERSAL*
Bob's shorty re-envisions Jamaica as a distinctly un-irie gangland.

48
KAISER CHIEFS
"I PREDICT A RIOT" *UNIVERSAL*
Who knew the streets of Leeds could be so hardcore?

47
THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS
"TWIN CINEMA" *MATADOR*
These north-of-the-border power-pop whizzes crank up the guitars and the filmstrip projector.

46
BRAD PAISLEY
"ALCOHOL" *ARISTA NASHVILLE*
A country jam saluting O'Douls, designated drivers and general temperance. Just kidding—it's about getting totally shitfaced.

45
GWEN STEFANI
"COOL" *INTERSCOPE*
Everyone's favorite Orange County girl gets kinda misty-eyed over breathless new wave synths.

44
SPOON
"I TURN MY CAMERA ON" *MERGE*
Austin indie-rock heroes write a sultry jam, perfect for the age of Rick Solomon and R. Kelly.

43
CIARA FEAT. LUDACRIS
"OH" *LA FACE*
The future Mrs. Bow Wow calls in a fellow Atlantan to help set the club off.

42
MADONNA
"HUNG UP" *WARNER BROS.*
Madge shakes off some noncommittal fool and shakes dat ass.

41
VERONICAS
"4EVER" *SIRE*
Cute twins bully a boy into an up-all-night booty call—empowering grrrl-pop meets *Penthouse Forum*!

40
JUNIOR SENIOR
"ITCH U CAN'T SKRATCH" *CRUNCHY FROG*
Danish gay/straight duo sing ecstatically about getting Bigfoot to twerk.

TEAIRRA: KENNETH CAPPELLO; FOO FIGHTERS: PEROU

Mariah sneaks into the White Stripes' dressing room.

39
PAUL WALL FEAT. BIG POKEY "SITTIN' SIDEWAYZ" *SWISHAHOUSE/ASYLUM/ATLANTIC*

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE:
For his breakout single, Houston rap's reigning cracker dug up a tape by the city's legendary DJ Screw, sampled one of its kaleidoscopically slow rhymes and recorded this squelchy salute to ostentatious ride-pimpage.

PAUL WALL SAYS:
"I still sit sideways. I sat sideways last week, man!"

AMAZING FACT:
In his side work as a jewelry-store owner, Paul Wall has sold Nelly six different $30,000 diamond grills—including a custom "Spiderman" grill for the St. Lunatic's son.

MCR, finishing last in the Screamo Softball League.

38
MARIAH CAREY
"SHAKE IT OFF" *ISLAND*
Bad boyfriend? Just do what Mariah does here: Dump his ass in a voicemail, then steal his car.

37
YING YANG TWINS
"WAIT (THE WHISPER SONG)" *TVT*
A club scorcher consisting of little more than catchy, gulping bass drums and drooling pussy lust.

36
YOUNG JEEZY
"THUG MOTIVATION 101" *DEF JAM*
The Snowman brags about his Hummer, his coke and his marble-floored, pimp-ass kitchen. *Aaaaaay.*

35
FIONA APPLE
"GET HIM BACK" *EPIC*
Over a muscular piano romp, F. App gets mad at an ex-boyfriend, fantasizes about getting even.

34
THREE 6 MAFIA
"STAY FLY" *COLUMBIA*
A Memphis salute to the high life, enhanced by a breathtaking, chopped-up hook.

33
T.I.
"BRING EM OUT" *ATLANTIC*
The Dirty South jailbird celebrates his un-incarceration with a hook courtesy of Shawn Carter.

32
SHAKIRA FEAT. ALEJANDRO SANZ
"LA TORTURA" *EPIC*
Colombia's genre-jumbling hottie shakes her bon-bon for a breakup duet that's not about Abu Ghraib.

31
HOT HOT HEAT
"GOODNIGHT GOODNIGHT" *REPRISE*
Natty Vancouverites sing a herky-jerky "final lullaby" to a poseur ex-girlfriend.

30
BE YOUR OWN PET
"DAMN DAMN LEASH" *XL*
Sneers about smothering boyfriends and overprotective 'rents from four high-school punks who are *so* cooler than you.

29
JUELZ SANTANA
"THERE IT GO (THE WHISTLE SONG)" *DIPLOMATS/DEF JAM*
Harlem MC hits the bigtime with a leering anthem for lunching construction workers everywhere.

28
LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
"DAFT PUNK IS PLAYING AT MY HOUSE" *DFA/EMI*
Brooklyn's reigning dance-rock wizard fantasizes about the raddest party ever.

27
MISSY ELLIOTT FEAT. PHARRELL
"ON AND ON" *GOLD MIND/ATLANTIC*
Two of hip-hop's thrillingest freaks team up over a creeping, wobbly synth loop.

26
KANYE WEST FEAT. CAM'RON AND CONSEQUENCE
"GONE" *ROC-A-FELLA*
Kanyeezy threatens early retirement over a dazzling, constantly mutating, Otis Redding–powered beat.

25
THE MARS VOLTA
"THE WIDOW" *GSL/STRUMMER/UNIVERSAL*
Proggy Texas stoners cook up a spooky, serpentine epic.

24
GORILLAZ
"FEEL GOOD INC." *VIRGIN*
Animatronic banger from this year's iPod poster boys. Er, poster monkeys.

23
M.I.A.
"BUCKY DONE GUN" *XL/INTERSCOPE*
Bridging Sri Lanka and Rio de Janeiro, it's a subaltern booty-bass meltdown!

22
ASHLEE SIMPSON
"BOYFRIEND" *GEFFEN*
Over 2005's best Franz Ferdinand riff, Ash insists she didn't take your man. (P.S. She totally did.)

21
MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
"HELENA" *REPRISE*
A histrionic fireworks spectacular for mall-Goths nationwide.

20
CAM'RON FEAT. KANYE WEST
"DOWN AND OUT" *DEF JAM*
'Ye and Killa Cam spit brilliant nonsense over a triumphant soul jack.

19
WHITE STRIPES
"BLUE ORCHID" *V2*
Rock's most outspoken purist whips up an infectiously impure slab of disco-metal glory.

WALL: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM; CAREY: JAMES WHITE; ROMANCE: LEGO

18

MIRANDA LAMBERT "KEROSENE" *EPIC NASHVILLE*

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE
A sweet-as-sugar small-town Texas girl torching her ex's house and walking away grinning.

MIRANDA LAMBERT SAYS
"I wrote it in, like, 20 minutes while my mom was driving me to be on *Nashville Star*. I guess I had a little attitude problem that day."

AMAZING FACT
Lambert's parents are both private investigators, and their stories about cheating lovers partly inspired "Kerosene"'s lyrics.

Franz Ferdinand: Scotland's best-dressed sychronized swimming team.

17
BRIGHT EYES
"LANDLOCKED BLUES" *SADDLE CREEK*
A hauntingly spare lament about drifting and drinking and having sex with CNN war coverage in the background.

16
COLDPLAY
"SPEED OF SOUND" *CAPITOL*
Chris Martin pledges his undying devotion at 761 miles per hour.

15
MARIAH CAREY
"WE BELONG TOGETHER" *ISLAND*
For three minutes and 21 seconds, we are all the prom kings and queens, and it's slow-dance time.

14
BECK
"GIRL" *INTERSCOPE*
A bouncy electro-pop ditty about bleached bones and stealing your crush's soul.

13
GREEN DAY
"BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS" *REPRISE*
Lone-wolf power ballad, perfect for stadiums or suburban bedrooms.

12
50 CENT
"JUST A LITTLE BIT" *INTERSCOPE*
A club hit about giving women immense sexual pleasure—then hiding your weaponry on them!

11
GWEN STEFANI
"HOLLABACK GIRL" *INTERSCOPE*
Gwen plays rebel cheerleader, talking shit and starting fights over a Neptunes beat that's B-A-N … well, you know.

10
FRANZ FERDINAND
"DO YOU WANT TO" *DOMINO/EPIC*
Overheard party chat inspires a sexually ambiguous disco-rock barnstormer.

9
WEEZER
"WE ARE ALL ON DRUGS" *GEFFEN*
Let's just say they won't be named D.A.R.E. spokesmen anytime soon.

8
THE GAME FEAT. 50 CENT
"HATE IT OR LOVE IT" *INTERSCOPE*
Over crackling soul, 50 Cent proves he has one while the Game name-drops dead people.

7
AMERIE
"I THING" *COLUMBIA*
Off-kilter dancefloor fave from an R&B sexpot who loves *The Lord of the Rings*. Sam Gamgee holla!

6
THE KILLERS
"MR. BRIGHTSIDE" *ISLAND*
A Mormon new wave pinup obsesses over a girl who thinks he's just a friend.

5
MIKE JONES FEAT. SLIM THUG AND PAUL WALL
"STILL TIPPIN'" *SWISHAHOUSE/ASYLUM/WARNER BROS.*
A deliciously woozy toast to a city where doing five m.p.h is considered speeding.

4
FALL OUT BOY
"SUGAR, WE'RE GOING DOWN" *ISLAND*
Chicago *TRL* punks use a boxing metaphor—and, like, 19 different hooks—to slam a sleeping-around ex.

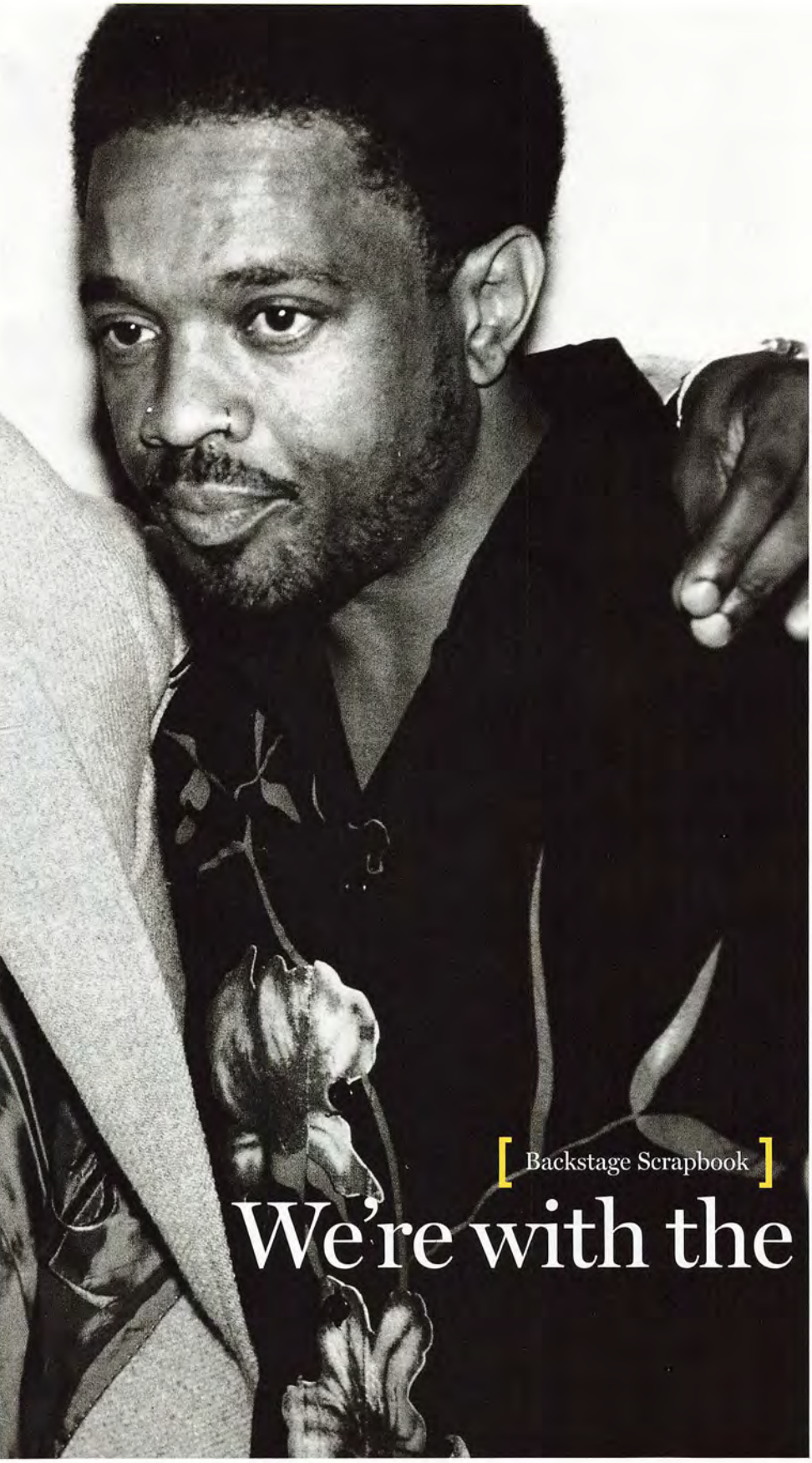
3
KANYE WEST FEAT. JAMIE FOXX
"GOLD DIGGER" *ROC-A-FELLA*
The truth comes out: Kanye West doesn't care about greedy people.

2
R. KELLY
"TRAPPED IN THE CLOSET" *JIVE*
Epic parable about clandestine desires unfit for society *and* a perfect excuse to talk about a whole lot of sex.

1
KELLY CLARKSON
"SINCE U BEEN GONE" *RCA*
The original Cowell Slayer ditches the maudlin ballads of her debut and roars back as … a rawk animal! In 2005's finest single, Clarkson provides the missing link between The N and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, building from a blasé sigh to a bad-boyfriend-obliterating explosion, propelled by a fantastically lean guitar chug. Best experienced wailing along, preferably into an air-mic.

LAMBERT: JACK GUY; FRANZ: GUZMAN

Backup singers the Kanyettes never really panned out.



[Backstage Scrapbook]

We're with the Band!

Have you always wanted to hang backstage with the year's most electrifying live acts, but were unwilling to, you know, do what it takes to get a laminate? This exclusive portfolio is the next-best thing to being there.

Kanye West

Photographed by KENNETH CAPPELLO
October 26, 2005, at the Ryan Center, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island

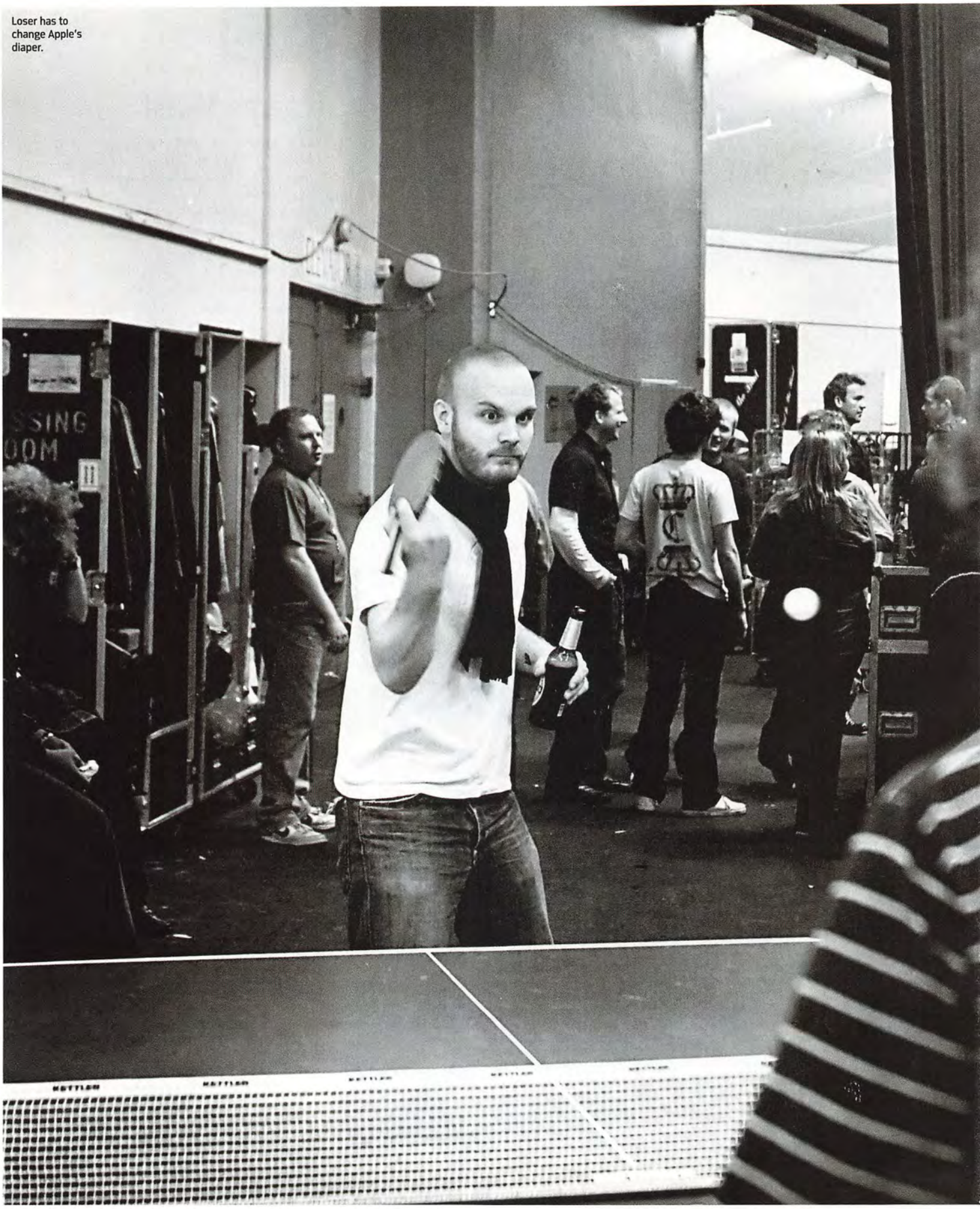
Days on the road in 2005: 71

Approximate number of fans rocked and/or rolled: 588,105

Music played on P.A. before taking the stage: Portishead's *Dummy* CD

I won't tour without: "My Marc Jacobs Vans that I wear every single day," says West. "I'm one of the few black people with scuffed shoes."

Strangest item in rider: "The turkey jerky. I thought it was good that it had a funny name—turkey jerky. I should make a song called 'Turkey Jerky'—'That turkey jerky, it's that turkey jerky!'"



Loser has to change Apple's diaper.

"Patty cake, patty cake ..."

[Backstage Scrapbook]

Coldplay

Photographed by PENNY HOWLE
October 30, 2005, at Forum, Copenhagen, Denmark

Days on the road in 2005: 210

Approximate number of fans rocked and/or rolled: 878,013

Typical per-gig dough earned: $714,371

Music played on P.A. before taking the stage: "Tomorrow Never Knows" by the Beatles

Cover we occasionally sneak into our set: Johnny Cash's "Ring of Fire"

On-tour boredom alleviator: "Books, really," says drummer Will Champion. "I just finished *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and before that I was reading a book by Ian McEwan called *Amsterdam*."

Strangest item in rider: "We always ask for socks. Any kind of socks. We always run out of them."

Favorite song to play: "At the moment, we're playing a B-side called 'How You See the World.' It's still fresh. We haven't been playing it for eight years, like 'Yellow.'"

Unwieldy costume head or no unwieldy costume head—the singer's hat stays *on*.

Fall Out Boy

Photographed by CHAPMAN BAEHLER
October 31, 2005, at the Bren Events Center, Irvine, California

Days on the road in 2005: 304

Approximate number of fans rocked and/or rolled: 237,857

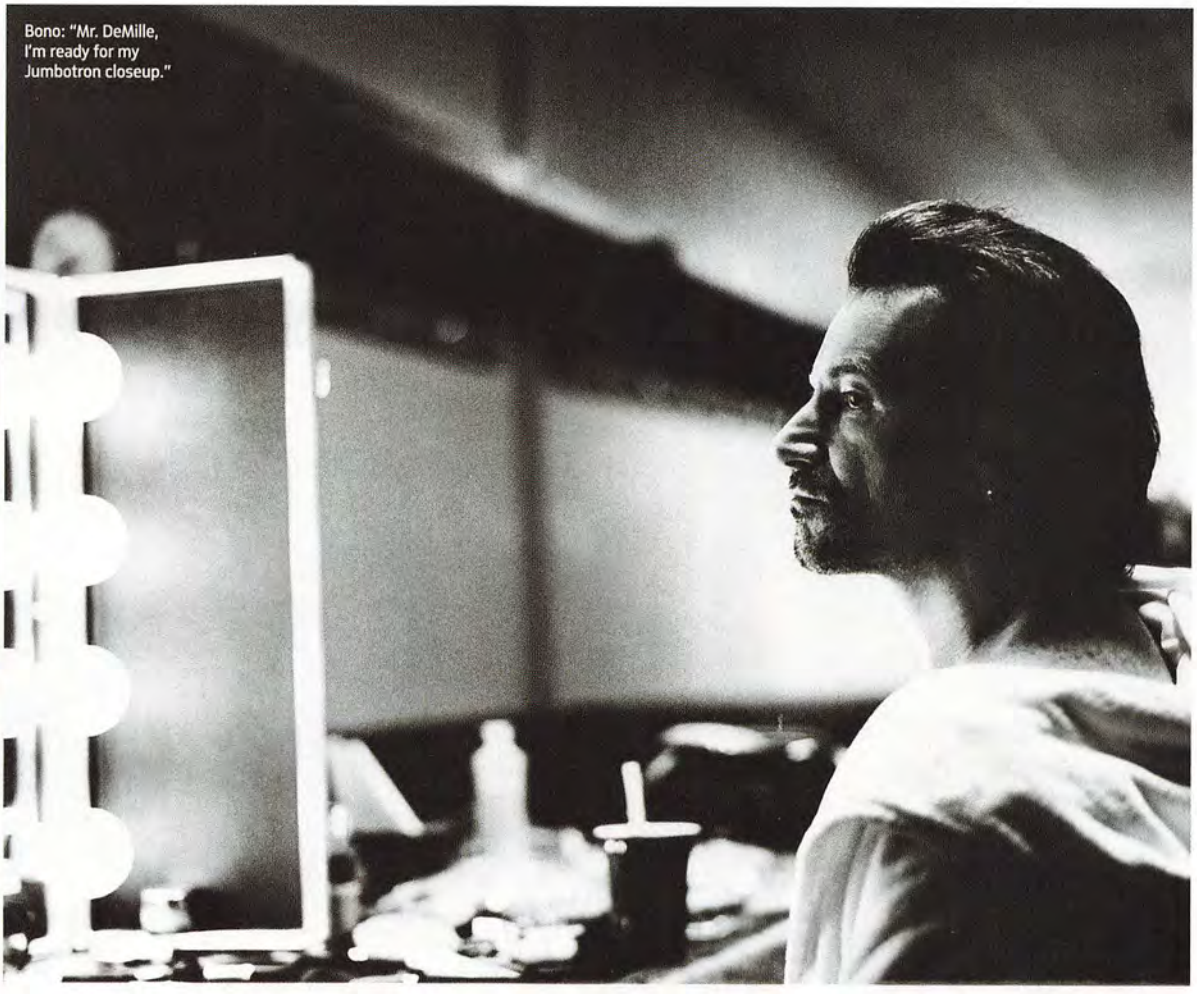
Typical per-gig dough earned: $17,559

Music played on P.A. before taking the stage: *Rushmore* soundtrack

Cover we occasionally sneak into our set: Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart"

Pre-show ritual: "The only thing we do is high-five each other right before we go on stage," says bassist Pete Wentz. "There is an order to the high-fiving, too. There were two shows we didn't follow the order, and they were pretty terrible."

Strangest item in rider: "Vintage Transformers toys. We don't get 'em a whole lot. They give us new Transformers, but no one gives us the first-generation metal ones from the '80s. They're rad."



Bono: "Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my Jumbotron closeup."

U2

Photographed by **KEVIN WESTENBERG**
April 28, 2005, at General Motors Place, Vancouver, British Columbia

Days on the road in 2005: 269

Approximate number of fans rocked and/or rolled: 1,289,609

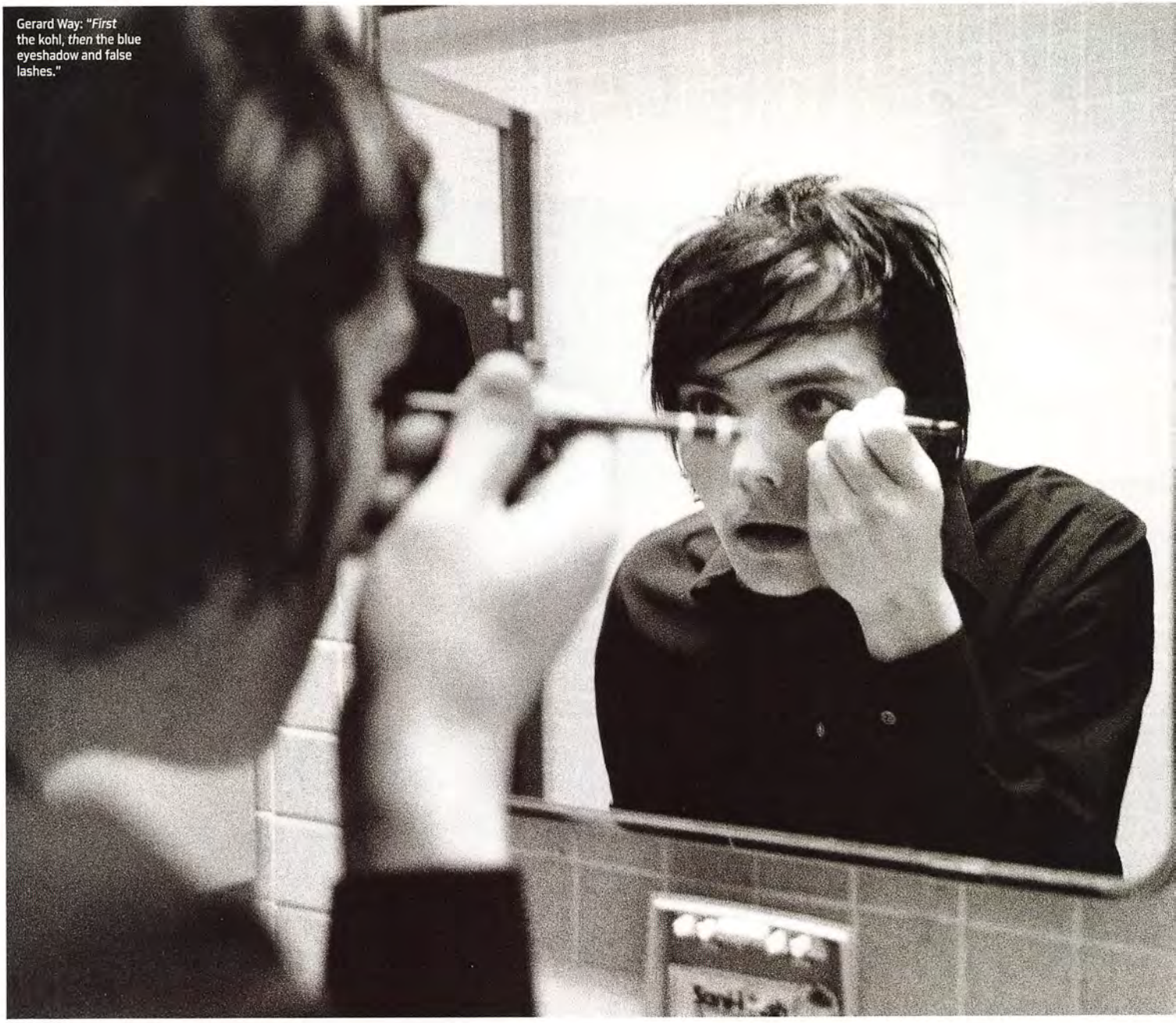
Typical per-gig dough earned: $3,700,000

Strangest song we played: "The First Time," from 1993's *Zooropa* (never played on tour before)

Music played on P.A. before taking the stage: The Arcade Fire, "Wake Up"

My on-tour boredom alleviator: "I'm never bored on tour," says the Edge. "I *dream* of boredom."

Strangest item in rider: "Some members of the band really hate anything lodged in their teeth, so it's a big thing if there are no toothpicks. It can really cause a flurry of people running around trying to get a toothpick together."



Gerard Way: "*First* the kohl, *then* the blue eyeshadow and false lashes."

My Chemical Romance

Photographed by KENNETH CAPPELLO
October 21, 2005, at the UMBC Fieldhouse, University of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland

Days on the road in 2005: 338

Approximate number of fans rocked and/or rolled: 464,190

Typical per-gig dough earned: $68,520

Music played on P.A. before taking the stage: "Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want" by the Smiths

Cover we occasionally sneak into our set: "Song 2" by Blur

Pre-show ritual: "We do 60 jumping jacks before every show," says frontman Gerard Way. "Frank [Iero, guitarist] has a weird stomach, so he can't do them."

Strangest item in rider: "Tab. I don't know if anyone really drinks it, but I've seen Mikey [Way, bassist] put it on his bass amp."

Fine, we admit it: Smoking *does* make you look cool.

Bright Eyes

Photographed by CHAPMAN BAEHLER
October 27, 2005, at Freeborn Hall, Davis, California

Days on the road in 2005: 216

Approximate number of fans rocked and/or rolled: 166,419

Typical per-gig dough earned: $46,333

Music played on P.A. before taking the stage: A playlist on the soundman's iPod that includes M. Ward, Yo La Tengo, Spoon, My Morning Jacket and Blonde Redhead.

Cover we occasionally sneak into our set: "Out on the Weekend" by Neil Young

Pre-show ritual: "I drink this magic potion which is grated ginger and salt water," says Conor Oberst. "Maybe it's just like Dumbo's feather, but I feel like I need it to sing."

Strangest item in rider: "Baby food. [Guitarist] Mike Mogis's baby goes with us pretty much everywhere. She likes carrots, I think."

TOURING DATA PROVIDED BY *POLLSTAR* MAGAZINE.

SPEND OUR CASH

$848 CHALLENGE!

THE ARTIST
JUELZ SANTANA

THE MISSION
TO SPEND $848 IN ONE DAY ANY WAY HE WANTS

THE REASON
BLENDER ASKED HIM TO

"WE'RE BRINGING THE STRIP CLUB HOME"

OFF-DUTY STRIPPERS, ERRANT GUNFIRE AND $848 OF BLENDER'S CASH. FOR HARLEM RAPPER JUELZ SANTANA, IT'S ALL IN A NIGHT'S WORK

BY JOSH EELLS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

WHEN WE FIRST asked Juelz Santana to spend $848 of *Blender*'s cash, the Harlem rapper was going to play suburban dad, shopping for furniture at a New Jersey IKEA. But then fate intervened in the form of a bullet: Cam'ron, the leader of Santana's Diplomats crew, was shot in Washington, D.C., and like a good lieutenant, Santana rushed to his bedside.

"It made us all a little more on-point," Santana says of the shooting. "You only live once, you dig? You gotta ride this shit till the wheels fall off."

So tonight we're in Atlanta with a new plan. It's a life-affirming plan—a defiant reaction to a near-tragic reminder of his own mortality. At least we think it is.

"Nah," says Santana. "I just love big-butt girls."

Turns out the 22-year-old MC—in town to promote his new album, *What the Game's Been Missing!*—has decided to throw a classic hip-hop afterparty. There will be booze. There will be weed. And, most important, there will be half-naked women. As Santana says, "Tonight we're bringing the strip club home."

In a city whose topless bars are the stuff of legend, spending the night *in* might seem like an odd choice. But the Diplomats pride themselves on being the DIY-est of rap crews. They've built a small empire peddling their mixtapes from Harlem storefronts and street corners; it's only fitting that their bootyfest would be bootleg, too.

When we meet around 10 P.M., Santana is putting the finishing touches on a Sharpie-sized blunt. (Thanks to The Man, it's the one part of tonight's festivities *Blender* isn't allowed to pay for.) As he lights up and takes a deep toke, he outlines the plan of attack. "First I'm gonna get drunk. Then I'm gonna get these ladies back to the hotel. And then we'll see what's poppin'."

We hop into his BMW and head out in search of a liquor store. But after a few minutes of cruising through the 'hood, it becomes apparent that we've overlooked one crucial fact: In Georgia, liquor stores are closed on Sundays. Suddenly it's shaping up to be one decidedly un-gangsta party. But in steps Santana to the rescue.

"I know people," he says, nodding. "It's not a problem."

Sure enough, a couple of phone calls later we're in an empty liquor store parking lot in East Atlanta, and Santana is hopping out of the car to meet "a guy." He's gone less than 10 minutes when there's a muffled *pop-pop-pop* in the distance.

Gunshots?

Santana reappears toting an arm full of bottles, just as two police cars come flying down the street, sirens wailing. One of them hits the brakes and turns abruptly into the parking lot. As our security guard goes to explain the situation, Santana sidles up to *Blender*: "You know it's always the writer who gets shot, right?"

Juelz outside one of Atlanta's BYO liquor stores.

Come for the affordable rates; stay for the turn-down service.

We think he's kidding, but either way, this seems like a good time to get going. Santana ducks back in the car, and after a quick detour to meet up with the rest of his crew—12 or so convivial guys with names like Black and Real—it's on to the hotel.

If the desk staff is at all uneasy at the sight of a dozen young black men marching through the lobby after midnight, they don't show it. The same can't be said, however, for the four middle-aged white guys waiting near the elevator. "We'll, uh, take the next one," one says.

Upstairs we're greeted by Juelz's older brother and road manager, Twin, who spent the afternoon picking up party supplies (soft drinks, cookies, a box of condoms that will go unused). Before long there's a knock on the door, and in walk four of Atlanta's finest: Vaniti, Nicole, Andreah and Tiny. Despite what Santana's publicist said earlier that day ("I wouldn't even call them strippers—they're straight-up ho's"), all seem very nice and utterly professional.

"Damn," Santana says, smiling approvingly. "Y'all got them bazooka butts!"

While he moves to the bar for a drink, the ladies retire to the bedroom and start changing into their work clothes. *Blender* asks if they've heard Santana's new single, "There It Go (The Whistle Song)," reportedly a gentlemen's-club fave. They shake their heads. "I mostly listen to oldies," Andreah says, peeling off her shirt to reveal a bikini top about eight sizes too small.

Hoping to jog their memories, we whistle the song's hook. "Oh, that one!" says Tiny. "They play that in the club all the time. It's a big crowd-pleaser."

We ask what they think of their host. "He's a flirt, I can tell," Andreah says.

Tiny shrugs. "I like his bandana."

"He's cute," says Vaniti. "He reminds me of a little boy."

Back in the living room, the party is in full swing. Bottles of Bacardi, Absolut, Hennessy and Cristal are quickly drained as the ladies strut around the suite. Santana flashes a few $100 bills, followed by lots and lots of singles. "I love Southern girls!" he proclaims. "Nothing Hollywood about 'em."

After a while, Santana leads the quartet into the bedroom for a more private show. But even six-inch stilettos and shoelace-thin thongs can't distract the rapper from himself: As the women gyrate around him, he silently mouths along with his own mixtape, booming in the background.

"Y'ALL GOT THEM **BAZOOKA** BUTTS!"

Though his beats are some of the hardest in hip-hop, Santana's boyish charm has earned him a rep as a bit of a playboy. "Ladies just love 'Elz," Twin says proudly. "He sees what he wants and he takes it."

Half an hour later, though, the only thing Santana appears to be taking is a nap. He's sprawled across the mattress, eyes closed, mouth half-open. Apparently his assertion that he "could do this for days" is only true until about 2:30 A.M. The ladies rise and begin putting on their coats.

Startled, Santana sits up. "Y'all aren't going home, are you?" he asks groggily. "You going to the club? Which one?"

As the girls head for the door, Santana thinks for a minute and, with a grin that says he knows better, jumps up to follow them. "Damn, y'all," he says, shaking his head. "I got a flight in the morning ..." [BLENDER]

HOW HE SPENT IT
JUELZ SANTANA
ATLANTA, GEORGIA
NOVEMBER 6, 2005

STRIPPERS	$400
LIQUOR	$345
COKES, SNACKS, CUPS, ICE	$41
CONDOMS	$9
TIPS	$53
TOTAL	**$848**

"The best work Diamond has done in 30 years"
– Newsweek

"Recaptures the spirit of his awesome early recordings"
– Rolling Stone

"Unlike anything Diamond's ever done"
– Entertainment Weekly

"Some of the most stripped-down, heartfelt material of his storied career"
– Billboard

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92
NOTORIOUS B.I.G.
The long-awaited, Diddy-curated, star-studded duets album is here—and Biggie must be rolling in his grave.
✪✪½

96
SHAKIRA
The Colombian pop wiz continues her bid for world domination with a new (English) album.
✪✪✪

102
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
What did *you* do by 25? In 1975, the young Boss made his masterpiece.
✪✪✪✪

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

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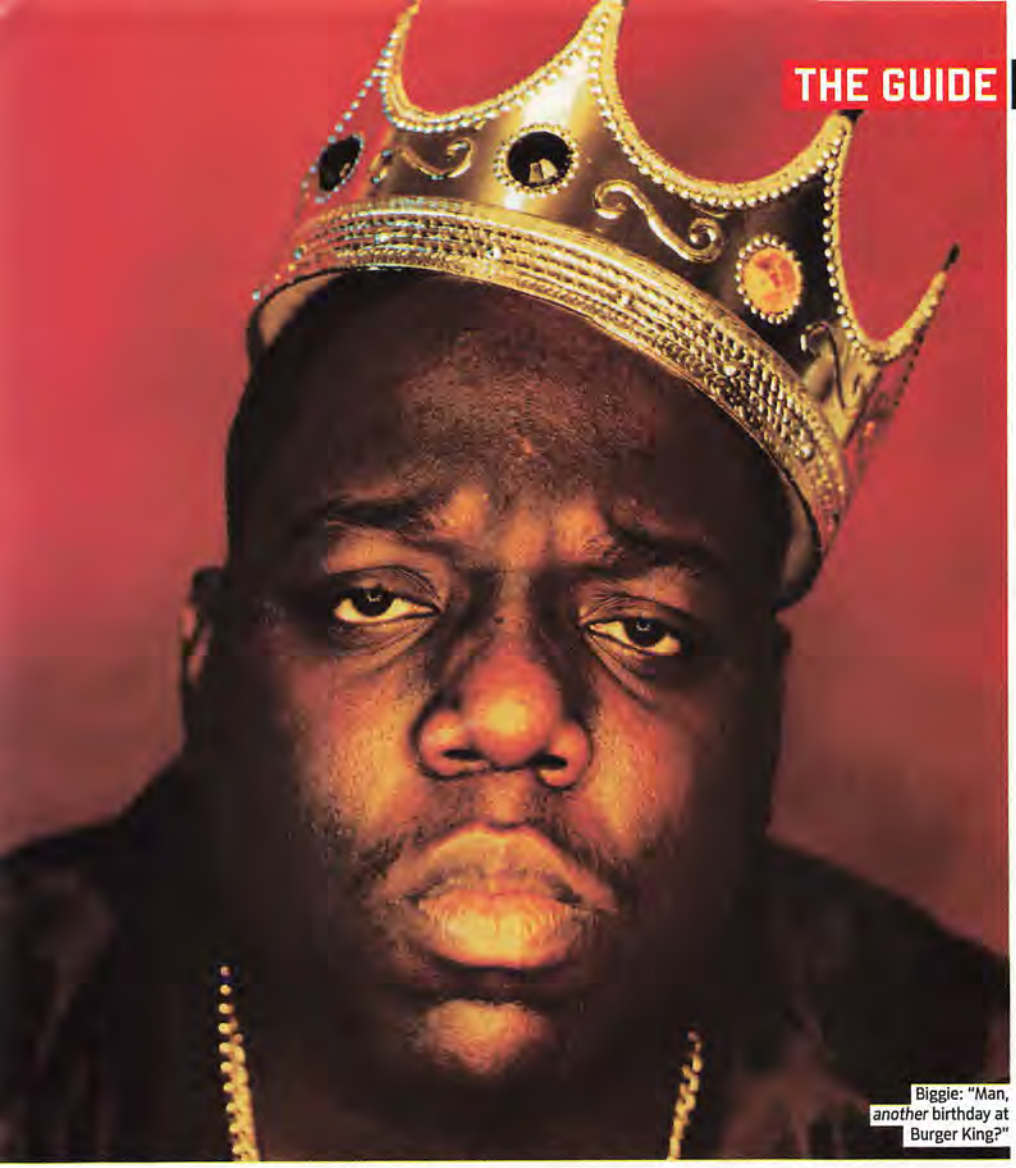
THE STROKES

NEW YORK CITY'S PRINCES OF COOL LACE UP THEIR CONVERSES FOR A BEEFIER-THAN-EVER THIRD ALBUM

STROKES: FRANK W. OCKENFELS 3; BIGGIE: BARRON CLAIBORNE/CORBIS OUTLINE; SHAKIRA: JAUME; SPRINGSTEEN: TERRY O'NEILL/GETTY IMAGES



Biggie: "Man, *another* birthday at Burger King?"

BARRON CLAIBORNE/CORBIS OUTLINE

NO BIGGIE

A STAR-STUDDED TRIBUTE FORGETS ABOUT THE MAN OF HONOR

NOTORIOUS B.I.G.

DUETS: THE FINAL CHAPTER ✪✪½

BAD BOY

SEAN COMBS WILL be the first to tell you: He's a businessman. He's bragged that he's interested in writing checks, not rhymes, and changing nicknames once a year is as close as he gets to "artistic growth." A few years ago, though, he found himself with death in his midst and art on his hands.

On March 9, 1997, his friend and label star Notorious B.I.G. was murdered in L.A., a case that's still unsolved. Three months later, Diddy released "I'll Be Missing You," the chart-topping, Police-sampling tribute that made his career. With it, he proved he could be crass *and* heartfelt, an ambulance chaser *and* an artist. Which brings us to the question at hand. We know going in that this album is a cash-in. But is it any good?

Rumors of a high-profile Biggie duets set began buzzing years ago, promising to put Biggie in the lofty company of Frank Sinatra and Ray Charles—aging artists to whom A-list stars flocked to honor—and Nat "King" Cole—who "collaborated" with his daughter on a huge hit more than 25 years after his death. The wake Diddy's thrown has a hell of a guest list: There are appearances from Eminem, Jay-Z, Nas, Nelly, R. Kelly, Snoop Dogg, Ludacris, Scarface, Timbaland, Swizz Beats, Just Blaze, even dead people like Tupac and Bob Marley. It's the kind of roster you usually see on telethons, a reminder that, in hip-hop's war of egos, Biggie's greatness is that rare thing everyone agrees on.

NO GANGSTA HAS BROKEN FREE OF BIGGIE'S LEGACY.

But with some exceptions, the guests crowd the stage, phone in second-rate work, insist on airtime for their sub-par homeys or all of the above. In other words, hip-hop business as usual. Seventeen songs long and nearly 40 guests strong, this is a tribute where the honoree gets lost in the shuffle, a galaxy with a black hole at its center.

Biggie's first and finest album, 1994's *Ready to Die*, featured exactly one guest MC. Today this would be borderline radical, but rappers then were expected to fill discs without a parade of assists. The 22-year-old Biggie, a hulking, thick-tongued former dope-dealer, created a persona so rich that no gangsta rapper since has broken free of its terms. That narrative about the dead-end drug-dealer who finds a way out (and an analogy) in the rap game? Biggie minted it. The thug who realized letting girls sing along wasn't such a bad idea? Biggie. The MC who, picking up from Rakim, stretched rapping from a rhythmically regular grid of couplets into a 3-D polygon of mutating cadences, internal rhymes, asides, different voices, perspective changes, hiccups, grunts and laughs? The fat man again.

For a rapper who had such a fine ear for samples, it's a shame that Biggie—no more than a sample himself here—is treated to the limp, synthesized creations on *Duets*. Producer after producer seems to think that the only fitting backdrop for this memorial is a caricature of gravity and ominousness: Pianos plink in minor keys and strings swell ad nauseam, rarely striking on hooks. Hip-hop artists are the most sentimental population this side of a Frank Capra screenplay, but they're more comfortable getting schmaltzy about mom than death—after all, they're supposed to be tougher than the Grim Reaper. So here grief is refigured as pompousness: big, fat, empty.

Certain moments burn through. "Whatchu Want," featuring Jay-Z, and "Beef," with fellow NYC Class of '94 grads Mobb Deep, highlight Biggie's deftness at grotesque, slapstick violence. "Just a Memory," with the phenomenally cold-blooded Clipse, is the one song that approximates the spare, sample-based menace of Biggie's prime. His lush pop side goes virtually unrepresented.

At points, Biggie doesn't even appear. The opening "It Has Been Said" starts with a fire-and-brimstone verse from Eminem so rhythmically dazzling it takes a few listens to realize he doesn't say very much. It spills into a doting Obie Trice rhyme, then finishes with Diddy, who makes it clear Biggie isn't the only one being feted and garlanded here: "I took him from coal to diamond," Diddy raps. "I molded his mind into the most phenomenal artist of any and all time/I made a Frankenstein, my design ..." With eulogizers like this, who needs enemies?

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Whatchu Want," "Just a Memory"

THE SCORE	
✪✪✪✪✪	A CLASSIC
✪✪✪✪	GREAT
✪✪✪	GOOD
✪✪	MEDIOCRE
✪	FOUL

CHRIS BROWN

CHRIS BROWN ✪✪✪

JIVE

Virginia youngster debuts with boot-knockin' R&B for the learner's-permit set

Lock up your sisters: This lil' Lothario is on a one-boy crusade to seduce as many chicks as he can before curfew kicks in. A sweet 16-year-old with a buttery choirboy croon and a lisp that makes him sound even younger, Brown can't quite pull off the grown-and-sexy slow-jams yet. But two upbeat Scott Storch tracks are standouts: The crunky dancefloor come-on "Run It!", featuring lady-killing rapper Juelz Santana, is steaming up the kinds of clubs Brown can't get into for five more years, and the swaggering "Gimme That" is a late contender for 2005's best pickup line: "I can show you why I make them straight A's in school." The honor roll never sounded so fly.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Gimme That," "Run It!"

KATE BUSH

AERIAL ✪✪✪½

COLUMBIA

The *Chinese Democracy* of willowy piano ballads about birds, geometry and laundry

NEW AGE GODDESS

Beloved by a cult including everyone from Tori Amos to Big Boi of Outkast, cosmic-minded singer-songwriter Bush has taken 12 years to follow up her last album, and she hasn't aimed low. For this double CD, she's returned to the grand, daffy conceptual scope (and gently percolating orchestrations) of her mid-'80s peak. At one point she croons the first hundred or so decimal places of pi, and the second disc, subtitled "A Sky of Honey," is a 40-minute suite about sunset and birdsong that culminates in Bush singing along with a flock of blackbirds. She balances her freakiness by matching her sublime chirp with grounded glories, too: "Mrs. Bartolozzi" is a dreamily sexy song about doing laundry.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "King of the Mountain," "Aerial"

BRIGHT EYES

MOTION SICKNESS ✪✪✪

TEAM LOVE

Notes and screams from the indie-rock tour of the year

Lest we think Type-A indie bard Conor Oberst had slacked off after releasing two separate, acclaimed albums last January, here are 15 thrilling highlights from the low-budget, near-global tour by his mandolin- and trumpet-toting gang Bright Eyes. *Sickness*'s setlist skips the electric *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn* in favor of the country-leaning *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning*, adding a few singles, covers of Elliott Smith and Canadian songwriter Leslie Feist and a funny, sneering protest song about the President's chats with God. The quite serious protest song "Road to Joy" gets made over with ballsy electric riffage that might surprise casual listeners. And when Oberst ends its memorable line rejecting fame with the call "Fuck it up, boys, make some noise!" these boys (and girls) really do.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "At the Bottom of Everything," "True Blue," "Road to Joy"

RAY DAVIES

THANKSGIVING DAY ✪✪✪✪

V2

The Kinks-master steps out on his own with some crusty holiday cheer

Ray Davies is that most extraordinary presence in pop—a sentimentalist with teeth. His perfect blends of mean and sappy have put the former Kink on the short list for greatest living songwriter for 40 years, and on this teaser EP for his forthcoming first-ever solo album, his equilibrium is intact. The title track leans toward tenderness, but there's some salt on the turkey. To a big-band beat, Davies follows scattered family members fulfilling or failing America's November obligation; his waggish delivery and the Vegas-meets-Broadway arrangements send up the subject's inherent corn. Three more scattered post-Kinks efforts—notably an ode to London in which Ray raps without embarrassing himself—reinforce his rep for nuance. Davies was born to

I LOVE THIS CD!

JAKE GYLLENHAAL
Actor, *Jarhead*

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
TRANSATLANTICISM *BARSUK*

"I like all their stuff, but that one in particular has such great lyrics."

John Mayer Trio: Passion. Desire. *Obsession*. For men.

BLUE MAN GROUP

SUBURBAN BOY GETS THE BLUES, SORT OF

JOHN MAYER TRIO

TRY! JOHN MAYER TRIO LIVE IN CONCERT ✪✪✪

AWARE/COLUMBIA

SQUEALING GIRLS GREET the John Mayer Trio on this live album, probably hoping for more sweet nothings from the guy who crooned "Your Body Is a Wonderland." Instead, Mayer courts a new love: the blues, as played by 1960s trios like Cream and the Jimi Hendrix Experience. His fans aren't the only ones startled by the transformation. The album starts with "Who Did You Think I Was?", as Mayer sings, "Am I the one who plays the quiet songs/Is he the one who turns the ladies on?" Well, yeah, dude.

Mayer knows that the shift is absurd; between songs, he jokes about his suburban hometown, Fairfield, Connecticut, being "where the blues was born." But that doesn't stop him from becoming one more white guy in search of soul. Backed by studio pros—Steve Jordan (who was in Keith Richards's Expensive Winos) and Pino Palladino (who subbed for John Entwistle in the Who)—Mayer plays a lot of guitar, wishing he was Eric Clapton or Buddy Guy.

He can't slash the way they can. Mayer is in over his head when he tries his hand at songs by Hendrix and Ray Charles (doing "I Got a Woman," which Kanye West recently sampled on "Gold Digger"). While he's no slouch on guitar, like a lot of aspiring bluesmen he doesn't know when to stop and just let a phrase bite.

Yet in his own songs, cutting back to a trio forces Mayer to be resourceful. He sets out his latest mix of neuroses and come-ons as Memphis soul in "Try" and "Gravity," hints at Hendrix chords in "Another Kind of Green" and suggests yet another trio, the Police, in the paranoid "Vultures." When he strips down "Something's Missing" and "Daughters" (from *Heavier Things*), he not only gets those high voices in the audience to sing along but also adds some sinew. If that's what Mayer's blues experiment teaches him, it's worth it.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD "Gravity," "Vultures"

JOHN MAYER'S CURRENT LISTENING

MY MORNING JACKET
Z *ATO/RCA*

JOHNNY "GUITAR" WATSON
THE FUNK ANTHOLOGY *SHOUT! FACTORY*

MAYER: TOM MUNRO; GYLLENHAAL: GREGG DEGUIRE/WIREIMAGE.COM

Nellie McKay, moments before zipping off her right arm.

NEW YORK DOLL

GOTHAM'S BRAINY CUTIE GETS A LITLE MORE FOCUSED

NELLIE MCKAY

PRETTY LITTLE HEAD ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

AH, THE PRECOCIOUS girls of New York—wandering around the Village in tweed coats and riding boots, hoping open mic night at the poetry slam will grant them their birthright of fame. These Gotham babies are fixtures in the era of Fiona Apple and Alicia Keys, but nobody rocks the persona quite as zealously as 23-year-old Nellie McKay. A Nice 'n Easy blonde with a daunting gift of gab, the London-born, Harlem-based McKay is so perfectly a Woody Allen character that it can be hard to remember there's a real woman beneath all that ambition. Blending VIP-room jazz, backpacker hip-hop and new wave revivalism in what can only be described as indie musical comedy, she's the embodiment of post–Parker Posey cool.

McKay gets slightly more accessible on this self-produced follow-up to her brilliant but scatterbrained 2004 debut. Though she seems to be done with rapping, her hip-hop loops and restless genre-mixing still save her from vintage-dress purgatory. Upbeat cuts sparkle, especially the gay wedding march "Cupcake" and "Bee Charmer," a duet with/tribute to earlier-generation Gotham baby Cyndi Lauper. If McKay's debut resembled a first trip to midtown Manhattan—dazzling, cacophonous, overwhelming—*Pretty Little Head* is more of a stroll downtown, with many interesting shop windows and an ice cream cone at the end.

Relative clarity doesn't mean McKay has turned toward self-exposure. She's a satirist, not a confessional poet, and her pen is sharpest on topics like gentrification or animal rights—she charms on themes folk singers have been making dull for decades. She's also good at language games, as on the archly alliterative "We Had It Right," featuring a very droll k.d. lang. McKay is pushing forward the craft of song, connecting Tin Pan Alley to Ben Folds and De La Soul. Pop ingénues aren't supposed to be so brainy—they're supposed to express emotions, something McKay does only abstractly. Thus, she gets labeled a nut. But then, eccentricity is often a New York girl's greatest plus.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD: "Cupcake," "The Down Low," "We Had It Right"

NELLIE MCKAY'S CURRENT LISTENING

JOHN LENNON WORKING CLASS HERO: THE DEFINITIVE LENNON *CAPITOL*

FIONA APPLE EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE *EPIC*

play rock's wicked uncle, and he's aging beautifully into the role.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD: "Thanksgiving Day (Alternative Mix)," "London Song"

GINUWINE

BACK II DA BASICS ✪✪

EPIC/SONY URBAN

This onetime Michael Jackson impersonator is just another pretty voice

Ginuwine has a velvety voice, a flawless falsetto, Jackson-esque moves and a dazzling six-pack. So? In today's glutted R&B market, he's a dime a dozen. Young 'uns (Mario, Omarion) out-dance him; veterans (R. Kelly) out-sing him; Usher outmidriffs him. Only innovative production or ingenious pickup lines can help him stand out from the pack, but Ginuwine's fifth album offers neither: It lacks the idiosyncratic production of a Timbaland, who worked on the singer's first two releases, and abounds in laughable lyrics ("She's like the diamonds in my pinkie ring"). "Betta Half" delivers a quiet intensity, while "Secrets" has a click-clack, club-shaking beat—otherwise, this is bedroom music that might put people to sleep, but won't make 'em sleep together.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Betta Half"

ANTHONY HAMILTON

AIN'T NOBODY WORRYIN' ✪✪✪

SO SO DEF/ZOMBA

Trucker-cap-wearing soul throwback writes, sings and that's it

Ever since hip-hop overshadowed R&B, male soul singers have gone a little flakey, envisioning themselves as clotheshangers, faux-rappers or music historians rather than solid singer-songwriters. North Carolina native Anthony Hamilton is happy to let rappers be rappers, and doesn't get misty-eyed about the golden-soul past. His third CD is a capacious collection, moving from tunes about preacher's daughters to love tragedies to race issues to big-boned women. Hamilton's music relies on classic gospel warmth and growls. Yet songs such as "Southern Stuff," which confuses barbecue and sex, and the title track, where Hamilton rails against social indifference with Anderson Cooper–style impatience, look back easefully as they move strongly on.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD: "Ain't Nobody Worryin'," "Where Did It Go Wrong"

I LOVE THIS CD!

JEREMY PIVEN
Actor, *Entourage*

COMMON
BE *GEFFEN*

"He makes thinking man's rap. Good beats, good rhymes, personal style in spades."

TALIB KWELI

RIGHT ABOUT NOW ✪✪✪

BLACKSMITH/KOCH

Brooklyn-based seeker of truth opts for some me-time on third solo release

It wasn't that long ago that Kanye West was dropping indie-rap hero Talib Kweli's name to get laid, and Jay-Z gave him props on *The Black Album*. As one half of the late-'90s group Black Star (Mos Def being the other), Kweli reintroduced revolutionary polemics and b-boy intellectualism to hip-hop at a time when Puff Daddy's bling factory was setting the agenda. But he never sold anywhere close to Diddy levels, which might account for the tactical shift here to braggadocio: Over the aggressive martial trill of "Rock On" and the prettified R&B of "Two & Two," Kweli expends most of his considerable lyrical talent touting his considerable lyrical talent. It's good as far it goes—but can't help feeling like a compromise.

G. BEATO

DOWNLOAD: "Drugs, Basketball & Rap," "Rock On"

LIL' FLIP

I NEED MINE ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

Houston star who got crunk with Pac-Man goes from ridin' rims to runnin' on fumes

LONE STAR GANGSTA

Like Jay-Z, to whom this Houston MC compares himself favorably several times, Lil' Flip is an entrepreneurial prodigy—he made his name selling thousands of mixtapes (earning the respect of H-Town legend DJ Screw) and finally broke big in 2004. He foreshadowed Houston rap's current explosion by combining the slow-mo stylings of Screw with poppy accoutrements like Pac-Man sounds and silky R&B hooks. His fourth major-label album offsets muscular, sludgy synth beats with casual, breezy gangsta boasts. The beats are often dazzling (or just plain weird, as on "I Need 2 Find My Way," which suggests chopped-and-screwed Staind), the rhymes less so. His disses in particular need a little work. "I went to France and found out you ain't large as us," he tells a rival on the club-banger "What It Do," and you know how much that hurts.

ANDREW BEAUJON

DOWNLOAD: "I Need 2 Find My Way," "Starched & Cleaned"

MCKAY: DANNY CLINCH/CORBIS OUTLINE; PIVEN: SCOTT KIRKLAND/FILMMAGIC.COM

Lil Wayne's "HI, HO'S!" shirt was in the wash.

LIL WAYNE

THA CARTER II ✪✪✪✪

CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL

Former New Orleans rap guppy grows into a shark

When Lil Wayne released his first album in 1999, he was a novelty, a 17-year-old kiddie gangsta who didn't curse because his mom wouldn't let him. Those days are long gone. Now he's a Southern mixtape veteran and an irrepressibly violent gutter-rapper, and a frantic, sinister edge has crept into his effortlessly sleazy N'Awlins croak. Also, he cusses. A lot. But Wayne proves maturity doesn't just mean four-letter words. He grapples with his pathological love of money and his father's death, riding epic soul tracks, Iron Maiden samples and glistening blues guitars with aplomb. And beneath his hard exterior, Wayne can still drop a punchline worthy of the lunchroom: "Usually I'm a hooligan for the money," he wheezes. "I'm eating, but I got a tapeworm in my tummy."

TOM BREIHAN

DOWNLOAD: "Shooter," "Best Rapper Alive"

MORNINGWOOD

MORNINGWOOD ✪✪½

CAPITOL

New York sleaze-rock for the post-Giuliani era

This NYC quartet has a leering attitude to match their sniggering name, but despite dirty minds and cock-rock posturing, Morningwood's synthetic glam-punk bluster just isn't very arousing. Snarling frontwoman Chantal Claret does her best Joan Jett impersonation over recycled Pixies riffs, but despite her fervent requests to "take off your clothes," provocative warnings to "never let me babysit" and whispery promises to "touch your collarbones and your other bones," she sounds cartoonish where she'd like to be sleazy. The annoying habit of literally spelling things out in cheerleading chants ("M.O.R.N.I.N.G.W.O.O.D," "E.V.E.R.Y.B.O.D.Y. rules") doesn't

WAYNE: JONATHAN MANNION; HOT CHIP: JASON MANNING

THE CD WE'RE TOTALLY GAY FOR

HOT CHIP

COMING ON STRONG ✪✪✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

Cheeky Brits offer lo-fi, low-key blend of faux-R&B and real emotion

The title is ironic; this music can barely look you in the eye. Imagine a bunch of Brits striving for the sass & sheen of modern R&B, but too diffident to match the swagger. In other words, N.E.R.D. by real nerds. The Hot Chip vibe is distilled in "Playboy," where a lovelorn protagonist cheers himself by cruising London with the top down, gangsta-style: "Driving in my Peugeot/20-inch rims with the chrome now/Blazin' out Yo La Tengo." They're not mocking rap so much as conveying the pathos of the gap between pop's fantasy world and the humdrum reality most of us must inhabit. Bling on a budget, Hot Chip's music is woven from burbling analog synths, but the reference points are drawn from the last 30 years of black pop: Stevie Wonder, S.O.S. Band, Dr. Dre. Insidiously melodic and, in its subdued way, genuinely soulful, it's the best record of its ilk since the Streets' debut.

SIMON REYNOLDS

DOWNLOAD: "Keep Fallin'," "Playboy," "Shining Escalade," "You Ride, We Ride, in My Ride"

You know what they say about guys with giant green hands ...

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This 2-disc release delivers some the of the band's most ferocious rock and also showcases their sensitive side.

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Perhaps the most revolutionary release since their debut, it's a masterful blend of creativity and disarray.

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Shakira knows what you're thinking. *Ewwww.*

SHAKI ALL OVER

GLOBAL POP PHENOM GRABS FOR YOUR ZIPPER

SHAKIRA

ORAL FIXATION, VOL 2 ✪✪✪

EPIC

SHE SAYS THE title has something to do with childhood id, but the whole oral fixation thing may just be Shakira's will to inhale great gobs of the world. The Colombian-Lebanese pop star, who can sing in Spanish, English and a few other languages, too, acts as a master database of pop. On this English-language sequel to last summer's *Fijación Oral Vol. 1*, she invokes more than a dozen different female singers, from Kate Bush to Janis Joplin, and her voice stretches and warps, like fatigued elastic, under the force.

Already overwrought in Spanish, she's almost dippy in English. She's the principal songwriter and producer here, so the surfeit of soft-rock and power ballads, rather than the left turns into punk and bossa nova that graced *Vol. 1*, was presumably her idea. Fighting against some terrible lyrics ("I've cried a thousand storms/I've blown away the clouds"), her songs demonstrate old-fashioned craft, and her hybridized production can be striking.

Often, she's laying a contemporary matte finish over old-fashioned pop excesses, such as the slick synth washes in "The Day and the Time," an excellent track that appeared on *Vol. 1* as "Día Especial." There's more: In "Animal City," the CD's most elaborate confection, Pong noises, robot rhythms and surf guitar jostle against the globalized Latinisms of mariachi horns and flamenco guitars. And also less: In "Hey You" she aims lower, putting kitschy swinging-London pop under tarty misfires like "I'd like to be the owner of the zipper on your jeans."

Here her ambition finally gets the best of her. Broader and more aggressive than both its predecessor and the 2001 English album *Laundry Service*, it also lacks a center of gravity. "Something"—the smart, lovely ballad that led off *Fijación Oral* as "En Tus Pupilas"—is Shakira at her best, and here it's buried toward the end of the album. *Fijación Oral* may have been just as overweeningly global, but it had an easy, mildly radical confidence; here, too many strained attempts at girlish megapop and navel-gazing lyrics about body image take the place of exciting music.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Don't Bother," "Animal City," "Something"

SHAKIRA'S CURRENT LISTENING

MATISYAHU
LIVE AT STUBB'S *OR MUSIC/JDUB/EPIC*

THE KILLERS
HOT FUSS *ISLAND*

help. It's New York trash-rock refigured for a cleaned-up, post-Giuliani city—unlikely to get many parties started, let alone blood flowing to the right places.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Take Off Your Clothes"

P.O.D.

TESTIFY ✪✪

ATLANTIC

Cali rap-rockers who headbang for Jesus, radio

The Lever 2000 of rap-rock crews, P.O.D. first came to fame by cleansing nü-metal's potty mouth, favoring prayer over profanity. But on their fifth disc, these "jah soldiers" run low on ammo. They enlist hitmaker Glen Ballard (Alanis Morissette, the Dave Matthews Band) to spit-shine their heavenly metal with hot-blooded female vocals, screamo choruses and symphonic-sounding piano and violin. But new touches only further dilute P.O.D's already watered-down sound. On the ska-tinged "Strength of My Life," they sound like the world's most polite rude boys, while "Goodbye for Now" is the kind of listless modern rock that could be bottled and sold as a sleep aid. They declare their desire to make an album that "sounds like war" (a song title), but at the end of the day it feels more like a ceasefire.

JASON BRACELIN

DOWNLOAD: "Mistakes & Glories"

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

OVER THE YEARS AND THROUGH THE WOODS ✪✪✪✪

INTERSCOPE

Sludgy jams for your '79 Econoline panel van ... or your DVD player

After four albums of hooky stoner metal, king Queen Josh Homme has seen more supporting-cast changes than *ER*. The lineup touring behind 2005's *Lullabies to Paralyze* isn't the band's flashiest—bassist Alain Johannes lacks ex-bassist Nick Oliveri's loose-cannon presence, while Led-fisted drummer Joey Castillo lacks Dave Grohl's Dave Grohl-ness—but Homme knows a good thing when he hears it. This career-spanning live set, recorded in London in August and accompanied by a DVD bursting with three hours of concert footage, serves as a reminder of why the likes of Grohl and Mark Lanegan hitched their wagons to Homme's star to begin with. "I Wanna Make It Wit' Chu," a mid-tempo come-on from Homme's Desert Sessions side project, proves crooning and cock-rock needn't be mutually exclusive, while the twin-guitar noodling in the nine-plus-minute "You Can't Quit Me, Baby" feels more like classic-FM riffage than proggy indulgence. This wallet-friendly sampler—particularly the rarity-packed DVD—finds mainstream rock's great white hope in peak form.

STEVE KANDELL

DOWNLOAD: "Regular John," "I Wanna Make It Wit' Chu," "Little Sister"

SAINT ETIENNE

TALES FROM TURNPIKE HOUSE ✪✪✪

SAVOY JAZZ

In their sixteenth year, London aesthetes search for grit, find only beauty

For all their worldly sophisto-pop airs, Saint Etienne have always been a London band, as steeped in local color as the Kinks, the Clash or the Streets. The difference is that these electro aesthetes envision their hometown not as a bustling metropolis but as a serene utopia, suspended in time or a parallel universe. The trio's latest inches into the grimy real world, hanging out in a London housing project for a full 24 hours, from milk delivery to last orders. The results are predictably gorgeous. "Side Streets" dispels fears of back-alley muggings with Beach Boys harmonies; "Stars Above Us" finds disco heaven in a rooftop sunset. Not much happens, which seems to be the point: In these vivid snapshots of daily life, the mundane and the magical are one and the same.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Side Streets," "Stars Above Us"

SCOTT STAPP

THE GREAT DIVIDE ✪

WIND-UP

Former Creed singer, beloved by Mel Gibson, transforms into the grunge Vanilla Ice

Levitating in a video, nearly destroying your vocal cords with steroids, saddling your son with the name "Jagger"—one hopes Scott Stapp would look back on these choices with a nip of chagrin. Guess not: The former Creed leader's solo debut

I LOVE THIS CD!

DANIEL RADCLIFFE
Actor, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

MELANIE
BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE: THE GREATEST HITS OF MELANIE
BUDDHA

"My Dad turned me onto Melanie, and she's brilliant. There's a song on there called 'What Have They Done to My Song, Ma' that I love. The whole thing is amazing."

SHAKIRA: JAUME; RADCLIFFE: TONY BARSON/WIREIMAGE.COM

Saint Etienne: "Where the hell is the Re/Max guy?"

pushes that band's raise-the-arena-roof God-rock clichés even further toward some terrifying vortex of bluster. That char-broiled baritone is back, howling about crisis and redemption over endless guitar arpeggios and cymbal crashes. Stapp's fascination with spatial metaphors continues; instead of "Higher" and "With Arms Wide Open," his Creed signatures, we get "Surround Me" and "You Will Soar." His fury, though, sounds less like righteous indignation and more like petty arrogance or fake martyrdom. When Stapp reins himself in, he hits that warm spot where machismo melts slightly, like cheese. Rock traditionalists love that shit, and it's pretty certain they'll continue to support Stapp's efforts at making a holy fool of himself.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD: None

TRICK-TRICK

THE PEOPLE VS. ✪✪

MOTOWN

Eminem-endorsed Detroit gangsta imagines killing a lot of people—and one he swears he didn't

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I beseech you. Why would I run behind someone with a 50-round assault rifle, shoot him five times in the back of the head and send his brain splattering all over the pavement? This stocky 7-Mile tough spends the tense, hammering "M-1" recounting the first-degree murder charge he faced (and ultimately beat after several months in prison) in 2004, but his claim to real-life innocence also doubles as a detailed, sadistic fantasy. It's a deftly knotted moment, carried along by Trick-Trick's fiery bark. None of the gangsta taunts that fill the rest of his major-label debut match it for smarts, although his habit of off-key singing is charmingly, unexpectedly silly. "Welcome 2 Detroit," produced by and featuring Eminem, is a raucous, hard-swinging brawl, catchier and more fun than anything else here.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Welcome 2 Detroit," "M-1"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

LUDACRIS PRESENTS ... DISTURBING THA PEACE ✪✪✪

DEF JAM SOUTH

The Dirty South's best MC trots out a dozen hungry up-and-comers—plus guests!

Ludacris is so ginormous, even his crew has crews. Disturbing tha Peace, a sprawling 10-year-old collective with a membership bigger than an NBA team, now encompasses members of other groups, including Field Mob and Playaz Circle, in addition to solo acts Bobby Valentino and Shawnna. So this showcase's cohesiveness and chemistry is something of a minor miracle. Dark-edged, austerely booming beats hold the somewhat hook-deficient circus together, and while no one outshines Luda's hyper-charismatic laser focus, most bring their A-game. Newcomer Shareefa matches the wall-of-sound soul of "I'll Be Around" with enough grit, heart and threats to send most divas scampering, and "Family Affair," which assembles nearly everyone, is a boisterous, economical testament to the diversity of flows. There's even pummeling, percussive metal in the form of Lazyeye's "Blood in the Air." Must've been a record-release party to remember.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Georgia," "I'll Be Around"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

OUR NEW ORLEANS ✪✪✪ ½

NONESUCH

Songs of tragedy, dignity and hope from the greatest generation of Southern musicians

A precious, vulnerable island of funerals and festivals, New Orleans isn't in a party mood right now; it's difficult to dance when you're soaked and homeless. So blame the weather—or FEMA—if the beats and spirits don't bounce as Super Ball high as they usually would on this benefit album led by a past-prime generation of Louisiana masters and mistresses. Even at past-prime,

COURTESY SAVOY JAZZ

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Foo Fighters
In Your Honor
This 2-disc release delivers some of the band's also showcases

System Of A Down
Hypnotize
An amazing album on its own was made to be the perfect the band's previous hit,

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Get Rich
The s
featur
Mobb

Korn
See You On The Other Side
Perhaps since their debut, most

Madonna
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BEST BUY

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The Strokes, upon hearing that *7th Heaven* was canceled.

ROUGH STUFF

NYC DUMPSTER DANDIES MAKE A BRAWNY, BLOODY BARFIGHT OF AN ALBUM

THE STROKES

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF EARTH

✪✪✪½

RCA

THE STROKES' 2001 debut, *Is This It*, hummed like a sleek machine—all spring-loaded riffs, artfully slurred come-ons and downtown cool. But then, with 2003's *Room on Fire*, they went and did it all over again … only this time not as well. Critics balked, and fans bought only half as many copies. So on album three, it's time for a change—one born, it seems, of market ambition as much as artistic evolution.

Longtime Strokes producer Gordon Raphael is all but absent here, replaced by David Kahne, who's best known for giving poppy skate-punks like Sublime and Sugar Ray their asphalt burns. The difference shows: First single "Juicebox" rumbles along on a blistering helicopter riff and a low-end thrash that wouldn't sound out of place on a Velvet Revolver album, while guitarist Albert Hammond Jr. shreds "Vision of Division" like Tom Morello in Chucks and a skinny tie. Their songs used to lock together like pins and tumblers; these jostle and scrape, metal on metal.

At 52 minutes—almost twice as long as their last album—there's enough room for vintage Strokes too. Songs like "Electricityscape" crackle with the promise of a Manhattan Saturday night, while the Barry Manilow–jacking "Razorblade" has their trademark liquidy guitars and delightfully snide chorus ("My feelings are more important than yours"). But where disenchantment was once an accessory they wore like a favorite pair of sunglasses, now it sounds real. Kahne brings Julian Casablancas's voice front-and-center, scrubbing away the 19 layers of distortion to expose the real grit underneath, and what he finds isn't happy: "I'm tired of everyone I know." "Today they'll talk about us and tomorrow they won't care." And the most devastating of all, from album closer "Red Light": "Can't you see the sky is not the limit no more?"

Earth is the sound of a band coming to that inevitable realization: five patrician perfectionists who've resolved to sound sloppy, even (or especially) at the risk of fucking up. A few years ago, only the Strokes' $200 jeans and carefully mussed hair were dirty. Now their hands are too.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Juicebox," "Vision of Division," "You Only Live Once"

singers Irma Thomas ("Back Water Blues") and Dr. John ("World I Never Made") summon jaunty resilience from Southern R&B, and the Wild Magnolias' parading version of "Brother John Is Gone" is as quirky and irrepressible as New Orleans itself. For a lesson in how this affair could have gone wrong, look at *Come Together Now*, a gaudy hurricane-relief compilation burdened by Sting's Louis Armstrong impersonation, among other vulgarities.

ROB TANNENBAUM

DOWNLOAD: Davell Crawford, "Gather By the River"; Irma Thomas, "Back Water Blues"

WE ARE SCIENTISTS

WITH LOVE AND SQUALOR ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

From Brooklyn, via the Bay Area, here comes your girlfriend's new favorite postpunk power trio

We Are Scientists aren't, really—at least not scientists in the sense of those labcoat-clad brainiacs who discover new things. They're a trio of rock-star wannabes who formed in Berkeley and moved to Brooklyn, and who steal less from the classic '80s postpunk favored by their alt-rock peers than from Interpol and the Killers' glammy updates of same. (Wait: Maybe that *is* new!) Fetching frontman Keith Murray has a gothy baritone and looks a bit like that Bright Eyes dude—skinny and dark; in his group's hooky songs and goofy *Hard Day's Night*–style videos, his swaggering helplessness aims to wet panties. "If you want to use my body," he croons on the lead-off single, "Nobody Move, Nobody Get Hurt," "go for it, yeah!" No, it ain't rocket science. But when they're headlining arenas, it's gonna look fairly brilliant.

WILL HERMES

DOWNLOAD: "Nobody Move, Nobody Get Hurt," "The Great Escape"

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST NEW RELEASES FROM THE PAST MONTHS

BRAKES

GIVE BLOOD

ROUGH TRADE

Recorded in five days, it's a blur of sloppy punk and country twang from four U.K. boozehounds.

LADY SOVEREIGN

VERTICALLY CHALLENGED

CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES

On her cheeky debut EP, Sov puts all those other 5-foot-1 white British female MCs to shame.

WILCO

KICKING TELEVISION—LIVE IN CHICAGO

NONESUCH

Jeff Tweedy's moody alt-country futurists take to the stage for a slow-burning live set.

NEIL DIAMOND

12 SONGS

COLUMBIA

Rick Rubin helps the schlockmeister get his Johnny Cash on. Stark, haunting and unflinchingly great.

LIL' KIM

THE NAKED TRUTH

ATLANTIC

Angry and more focused than ever, the felonious Queen Bee finally busts out of Biggie's shadow. Guards!

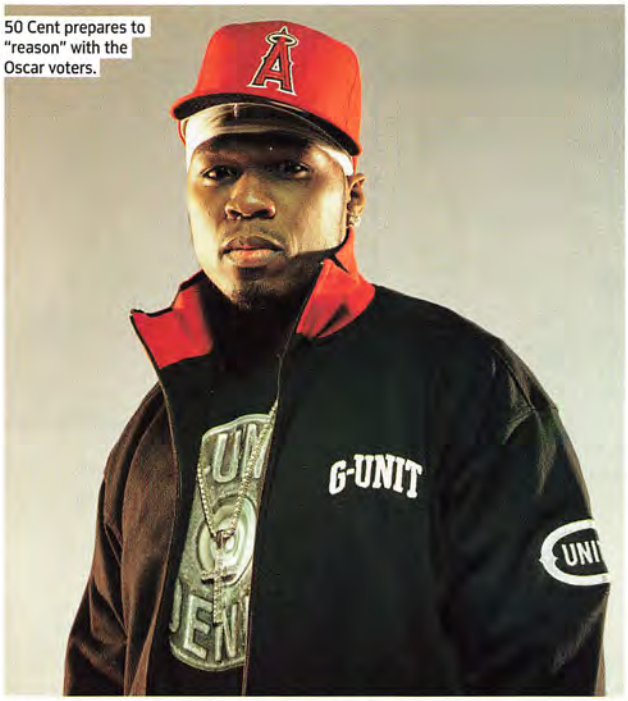
STEVIE WONDER

A TIME 2 LOVE

MOTOWN

On his first album in a decade, the Motown legend's loverman balladeering is as corny—and terrific—as ever.

STROKES: FRANK W. OCKENFELS 3



50 Cent prepares to "reason" with the Oscar voters.

ZACH GOLD

HOLLYWOODEN

50 GETS STUCK IN A NOSTALGIA RUT

VARIOUS ARTISTS

MUSIC FROM AND INSPIRED BY *GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'*, THE MOTION PICTURE ✪✪✪

G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE

IS IT EVER too early to pick your own golden age? In the past six months, 50 Cent has emoted about his early life—roughly, the period that spans from his drug-dealing mother's violent death to his infinitely more violent near-death—in an autobiography, fictionalized it in a film and adapted it into a fantasy world for a videogame. It seems this hustler-turned-stickup-kid-turned-brash-rap-upstart is trying on a new role: budding nostalgist. His days of hunger make for better stories—and better music—than his superstar present, and he spends this soundtrack trying to reclaim the charge of his past.

With the exception of the singsong "Window Shopper," though, these are largely rote routines: 50 performing 50, and unconvincingly at that. Though wrapped in a dusty soul sample—the kind preferred by rap underdogs—"Hustlers Ambition" is a predictable champion's anthem. And though "Talk About Me" promises self-awareness—50 raps each verse from the perspective of a different gossip—it's utterly disingenuous. Even haters, it seems, keep 50 front and center.

Here, with the boss conserving energy, his G-Unit second-stringers get to unwind, and they ultimately steal the show. A peculiar beat, perched halfway between new wave and salsa, makes "Get Low" Lloyd Banks's least conventional, and most compelling, love song. And on "You Already Know," he and Young Buck sound sprightly and sinister over what sound like tuned-down guitars from *Deliverance*.

On the final two songs here, 50 emerges reenergized and familiar. "Best Friend" is an airy, gloriously absurd confection à la "21 Questions," and "I'll Whip Ya Head Boy," with Young Buck, is as joyfully riotous as its title. They're proof that 50 can still be a sharpshooter, but also acknowledgments—boasts, even—that what once was is much more compelling than what is.

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD: "You Already Know," "Window Shopper"

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THE 40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

ANGRY, RAPPING HONKIES OUTNUMBER SUPER-SUAVE R&B DUDES IN THIS MONTH'S TOP THREE

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"WHEN I'M GONE"	EMINEM	*CURTAIN CALL* SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
2	"TWISTED TRANSISTOR"	KORN	*SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE* VIRGIN
3	"RUN IT!"	CHRIS BROWN	*CHRIS BROWN* JIVE
4	"DON'T FORGET ABOUT US"	MARIAH CAREY	*THE EMANCIPATION OF MIMI* ISLAND
5	"HEARD 'EM SAY"	KANYE WEST FEAT. ADAM LEVINE	*LATE REGISTRATION* ROC-A-FELLA
6	"GRILLZ"	NELLY	*SWEAT/SUIT* FO' REEL/UNIVERSAL
7	"DON'T BOTHER"	SHAKIRA	*ORAL FIXATION, VOL. 2* EPIC
8	"HYPNOTIZE"	SYSTEM OF A DOWN	*HYPNOTIZE* AMERICAN/COLUMBIA
9	"I'M SPRUNG"	T-PAIN	*RAPPA TERNT SANGA* JIVE
10	"SOME HEARTS"	CARRIE UNDERWOOD	*SOME HEARTS* ARISTA NASHVILLE
11	"WINDOW SHOPPER"	50 CENT	*GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN'* G-UNIT/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
12	"SUGAR, WE'RE GOING DOWN"	FALL OUT BOY	*FROM UNDER THE CORK TREE* ISLAND
13	"PHOTOGRAPH"	NICKELBACK	*ALL THE RIGHT REASONS* ROADRUNNER
14	"SOUL SURVIVOR"	YOUNG JEEZY FEAT. AKON	*LET'S GET IT: THUG MOTIVATION 101* DEF JAM
15	"TALK"	COLDPLAY	*X&Y* CAPITOL
16	"ONLY U"	ASHANTI	*CONCRETE ROSE* MURDER INC/DEF JAM
17	"SOUL MEETS BODY"	DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE	*PLANS* ATLANTIC
18	"HUNG UP"	MADONNA	*CONFESSIONS ON A DANCE FLOOR* WARNER BROS.
19	"BE WITHOUT YOU"	MARY J. BLIGE	*THE BREAKTHROUGH* GEFFEN
20	"CHECK ON IT"	DESTINY'S CHILD	*#1'S* COLUMBIA
21	"KING WITHOUT A CROWN"	MATISYAHU	*LIVE AT STUBB'S* J DUB/EPIC
22	"BECAUSE OF YOU"	KELLY CLARKSON	*BREAKAWAY* RCA
23	"MY HUMPS"	BLACK EYED PEAS	*MONKEY BUSINESS* A&M
24	"FEEL GOOD INC."	GORILLAZ	*DEMON DAYS* VIRGIN
25	"LUXURIOUS"	GWEN STEFANI	*LOVE.ANGEL.MUSIC.BABY.* INTERSCOPE
26	"THE SUFFERING"	COHEED AND CAMBRIA	*GOOD APOLLO, I'M BURNING ...* EQUAL VISION/COLUMBIA
27	"UNBREAKABLE"	ALICIA KEYS	*UNPLUGGED* J RECORDS
28	"BAT COUNTRY"	AVENGED SEVENFOLD	*CITY OF EVIL* WARNER BROS.
29	"WE BE BURNIN'"	SEAN PAUL	*THE TRINITY* VP/ATLANTIC
30	"STICKWITU"	PUSSYCAT DOLLS	*PCD* A&M/INTERSCOPE
31	"BOM BOM BOM"	LIVING THINGS	*AHEAD OF THE LIONS* JIVE
32	"FIREMAN"	LIL' WAYNE	*THA CARTER 2* CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL
33	"YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL"	JAMES BLUNT	*BACK TO BEDLAM* ATLANTIC/CUSTARD
34	"DANCE, DANCE"	FALL OUT BOY	*FROM UNDER THE CORK TREE* ISLAND
35	"WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS"	GREEN DAY	*AMERICAN IDIOT* REPRISE
36	"CONFESSIONS OF A BROKEN HEART"	LINDSAY LOHAN	*A LITTLE MORE PERSONAL* CASABLANCA/UNIVERSAL
37	"LAFFY TAFFY"	D4L	*DOWN FOR LIFE* ATLANTIC
38	"GIRL TONITE"	TWISTA	*THE DAY AFTER* ATLANTIC
39	"SO AMAZING"	JAGGED EDGE	*JAGGED EDGE* COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN
40	"THERE IT GO (THE WHISTLE SONG)"	JUELZ SANTANA	*WHAT THE GAME'S BEEN MISSING!* ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM

7

SHAKIRA

"DON'T BOTHER"

ORAL FIXATION, VOL.2

Fresh off an MTV Europe Best Female Award win, Shak is back with an English-language album. The lead single is a tale of sex and jealousy, in which this multiplatinum, multilingual, whip-smart Colombian bombshell pretends she's intimidated by a girl who speaks "perfect French." She plays New York's Z100 Jingle Ball this month.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

9

T-PAIN

"I'M SPRUNG"

RAPPA TERNT SANGA

Tallahassee's 20-year-old R&B smoothie (and ex-rapper—hence the fantastically phonetic album title) has his first hit with this vocoderific ode to a chick who's got him so horny he's even doing her dishes. Happy ending alert: They're now married! U.K. shorties can catch him in February when he launches his first British tour.

21

MATISYAHU

"KING WITHOUT A CROWN"

LIVE AT STUBB'S

As long as it's been rolled in a kosher kitchen, feel free to pass this Hasidic Jew a Marley-sized joint—he's a Hasid *who sings reggae*. You can catch him live (after Hannukah, that is): He plays Philadelphia December 24 and Washington, D.C., the 25th before heading to Detroit. *Pon tings gal dem l'chaim ma ha-inyanim I and I!*

31

LIVING THINGS

"BOM BOM BOM"

AHEAD OF THE LIONS

Living Things are three snarling brothers from the heartland who hate war, love getting busy and play rock—like this glammy first single—that sounds like both at once. See them in January at an anti-Bush rally in their native St. Louis; just try not to mention the song title to security guards on your flight there.

SHAKIRA: JAUME; T-PAIN: MARK BLACKWELL; MATISYAHU: SETH KUSHNER

THE STROKES FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF EARTH

THE NEW ALBUM IN STORES 01.03.06

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT

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Produced and Engineered by David Kahne / except Tracks 4, 8 & 9 Produced by David Kahne and Gordon Raphael / Mixed by Andy Wallace

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RE-RUN

IN HIS CAREER-MAKING THIRD ALBUM, A JERSEY CONTENDER TURNED AN OLD CHEVY INTO A PINK CADILLAC AND TOOK AN EPIC RIDE

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

BORN TO RUN (30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION)

✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM with Bruce Springsteen's 1975 breakthrough album was always how unabashedly it proclaimed its own greatness. The wall-of-sound, white-soul-at-the-opera-house *Born to Run* is definitely full of itself—its lead track emoted over five minutes of portentous piano, its title track laden with glockenspiel and guitar guitar guitar, its thematic burden an unresolved quest narrative, its groove as grand as a V-8 hearse. Newcomers may not get why its class-conscious songcraft provided a relief from the emptier pretensions of late-hippie arena-rock. Yet it sounds greater today than it ever did.

By definition, the remastered thirtieth-anniversary edition of the album that put a cult artist from South Jersey on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* isn't shy about its greatness either. Greatness is what such packages hawk, so be grateful that this one has a right. Rather than "bonus tracks"—45-rpm mix of "Born to Run," anybody?—you get the original album and nothing but the original album. The remastering adds only presence, warmth and texture to the digitalization, which by lax early-Columbia standards wasn't bad to begin with. Three decades later, Springsteen still takes pride in his workmanship and his art, and that's strong of him. But the bonus DVDs that bring the damage up to $40 suggest some questions—and not just who will watch either of them twice.

THE 25-YEAR-OLD SPRINGSTEEN BET HIS LIFE ON THIS ALBUM.

One disc is a re-edited version of an oft-bootlegged November 1975 London concert that lasts two hours; the other, 20 minutes of a 1973 performance in L.A. plus an 87-minute making-of-the-album documentary. Surprisingly, it's the documentary that conveys more of the impish irrepressibility that made Springsteen so hard to resist onstage when he was young. His febrile ambition is less omnipresent than fond memory would hope at the London show, which the documentary recalls as if it was V-E Day. It's there in London when the singer disappears into an onstage crevice during "Spirit in the Night" or launches another chorus of "Rosalita," and on the show-topping rock & roll covers. But it's intermittent on the *Born to Run* material and lost in the fog of several loosely structured earlier songs. Which isn't even to mention the solos—let's hope organist Danny Federici knows how lucky he is to have his job.

In the still photos, taped studio chatter, reminiscences and descriptions of the 25-year-old Springsteen who bet his life on *Born to Run*, however, youthful intensity is palpable. The idea here, as in so much public Springsteen, is to establish a seriousness that avoids the pomposity the music risks. We learn Springsteen composed the album's melodies on piano and worked out the words in a notebook where a single lyric can occupy dozens of mostly scratched-out pages. We hear a boogieing run-through of "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out," an abandoned femme chorus behind "Born to Run," a lost violin intro to "Jungleland"—all possible bonus-cut fodder. Springsteen grins sheepishly at these shards of misplaced enthusiasm. They were just errors, history tells the auteur. As of 1975, *Born to Run* said what he wanted to say, and because it's a realized work of art, its truth will endure.

But its truth is now historic. Whatever factual value there once was in Springsteen's epic vision of small-town street kids buying a cool old car and pursuing their destiny on the road—and it was always a romance—is reduced to poetry in a world where college graduates wait tables to get through the indentured servitude of internship and gas costs whatever the oil companies say it does. But if any rock star knows that, it's Springsteen. He's pleased that many of his former dead-enders can afford $40 commemorative reissues. If he's also angry that today's young have it worse, which he is, he can at least help them appreciate their parents' lives.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: "Born to Run," "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out," "Night"

TERRY O'NEILL/GETTY IMAGES

Bruce Springsteen in L.A., 1975: "That's me on the billboard. On the right."

THE SCORE	
✪✪✪✪✪	A CLASSIC
✪✪✪✪	GREAT
✪✪✪	GOOD
✪✪	MEDIOCRE
✪	FOUL

JACKSON BROWNE

RUNNING ON EMPTY ✪✪✪✪½

RHINO

A definitive singer-songwriter album from the poster boy of California introspection

The grind of touring life has to be rock's biggest cliché—but if Jackson Browne has seen a million faces and soft-rocked them all, he once made the cliché matter. This concept album (including a DVD with two inessential unreleased songs) cuts deeper than most road sagas partly because Browne had the brilliant notion of recording on the fly—live moments onstage, at the back of the bus and in hotel rooms. It also works because he tapped the culture's circa-1977 sense that it was running on empty, feeling like a trashed Holiday Inn room—*Empty* is about something larger than the misery of room service. The title cut blazes with Danny Kortchmar and David Lindley's guitars; "You Love the Thunder" stops lamenting long enough to celebrate the drifting life. Rarely has roadkill sounded so exhilarating.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "You Love the Thunder," "The Load-Out," "Stay"

DIRE STRAITS

PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS: THE VERY BEST OF DIRE STRAITS & MARK KNOPFLER ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

Balding English teacher dons a John McEnroe headband, becomes a guitar god

Dire Straits' *Brothers in Arms* was a hard act to follow. An era-defining, 26-million-selling collision of boomer rock values and superclean 1985 pop sheen, it made a star of gruff frontman Mark Knopfler and an icon of his fastidious, J.J. Cale–inspired Fender Strat guitar. Instantly, the well that had supplied five albums of artful, pub-Springsteen rocking appeared to dry, and Knopfler's bid to foil expectations involved scuttling the band after one more album and beating an increasingly ascetic retreat down rootsy byways. Listening back through two CDs of resentful story songs, the supine grooving of "Sultans of Swing" and the epic, glowering "Private Investigations" have aged best, while "Money for Nothing"—that dullard's "satire" on MTV—sounds more harsh and constipated than ever. Expect the reunion tour any day now.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: "Sultans of Swing," "Romeo and Juliet"

Alanis still thinks rain on your wedding day is ironic.

GEORGE HARRISON AND FRIENDS

THE CONCERT FOR BANGLADESH ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Thirty-four years before Live 8, the Grumpiest Beatle invented the benefit concert

On August 1, 1971, The Beatles' resident mystic convened the cream of his rock-star pals (Ringo Starr and Eric Clapton included) at Madison Square Garden in New York to raise cash for the people of Bangladesh. As hilariously captured on this beautifully remastered two-CD set, the audience applauded sitar nabob Ravi Shankar's tuning-up before whooping throughout Harrison's own heartfelt but patchy set, powerful on *All Things Must Pass*'s "Wah-Wah" but powerless to resist showband clichés elsewhere. Meanwhile, Bob Dylan's shock emergence from hibernation brought forth a brilliant country-soul take on "Love Minus Zero/No Limit" (this reissue's bonus track). Conditions in Bangladesh were to worsen until the nadir of 1974's famine. A drop in the ocean, then, but the kind with ripples.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: Ravi Shankar, "Bangla Dhun"; George Harrison, "Wah-Wah"; Bob Dylan, "Love Minus Zero/No Limit"

I LOVE THIS CD!

ZACH BRAFF
Actor, *Garden State*

RAY LAMONTAGNE
TROUBLE
RCA

"I really like this guy. He's got a spectacular voice, so poetic and passionate. His singer-songwriter vibe would have fit in very well on the *Garden State* soundtrack."

ISAAC HAYES

ULTIMATE ISAAC HAYES—CAN YOU DIG IT? ✪✪✪✪

STAX/CONCORD

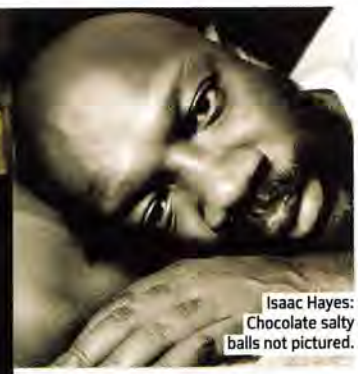
The bald king of blaxploitation soundtracks, now better known as Chef on *South Park*

L. RON-APPROVED!

Young rappers can sample his beats, cop his look (floor-length fur coats with matching hats) and try to outpimp his gold-trimmed 1972 El Dorado, but no one can steal Isaac Hayes's lovably badass soul. With his hot-buttered pate, boudoir baritone and expensive taste in orchestrations, he's one of the warm-and-fuzziest mofos R&B ever produced; late-'60s/early-'70s benchmarks like "Theme from *Shaft*" and "Walk On By" located the improbable hot spot between easy listening and black power. For the barely initiated, this 32-track collection (with a bonus DVD including material from a 1972 concert) is pure heaven: the primal art-funk of "Hyperbolicsyllabicsesquedalymistic," and a nearly unrecognizable cover of Hank Williams's country "I Can't Help It (If I'm Still in Love With You)" abounding with flutes and brass. Some tracks veer toward schmaltz, but the poverty anthem "Soulsville" is practically church.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: "Soulsville," "Walk On By," "Precious, Precious"



Isaac Hayes: Chocolate salty balls not pictured.

LIMPBIZKIT

GREATEST HITZ ✪

FLIP/GEFFEN

Internet-porn actor and fan of backwards baseball hats led the worst rock band of the '90s

Limpbizkit have spent their career pioneering payola strategies and the frat-hog aesthetic, covering George Michael's "Faith" homophobically and the Who's "Behind Blue Eyes" competence-phobically, and launching "Nookie" and "Break Stuff" into the river of worst songs ever. Nonetheless, there are many duties in the world of rock, and rap, and rap-rock; some great, some small, all sacred. One of the noblest is debasing yourself just to make somebody else look good; consider Britney's personal shopper, or her publicists. So it seems just to celebrate Fred Durst and company for making the gentlemen of Korn seem like authentic geniuses in comparison, a superb performance sustained across multiple fiscal years and concluded here (we pray), along with a sleeptronica medley of Mötley Crüe's "Home Sweet Home" and the Verve's "Bittersweet Symphony." Almost good enough to be bad.

JANE DARK

DOWNLOAD: None

ALANIS MORISSETTE

THE COLLECTION ✪✪✪½

MAVERICK

From blow jobs in a theater to Zen blessings, the career path of a questing Canuck

No mere greatest-hits—that, to be only a little mean, would be a reissue of her debut, *Jagged Little Pill*—this is Morissette's attempt to chart her growth by cherry-picking significant achievements. Some of her most popular music is here: "Thank U," with its propulsive melody and path-to-enlightenment specifics, holds up as the best "spiritual" pop song since George Harrison's "All Things Must Pass." Over 18 cuts, though, flaws are obvious: repetitive medium tempos and an anger that tends to berate. But for the millions who →

MORISSETTE: CHARMAN BAEHLER; HAYES: 60 CYCLE MEDIA; BRAFF: JESSE GRANT/WIREIMAGE.COM

Billy Joel: Float like a butterfly, sting like a diminutive Jewish guy in a sports coat.

BILLY: IDOL

METAL EXCESS, DYLAN AND CLASSICAL TWINKLING IN 80-LB. BOX

BILLY JOEL

MY LIVES ✪✪½

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

OF THE MANY vexing questions raised by this box set, one stands out: Does the world really need a reggae version of "Only the Good Die Young," Billy Joel's ode to guilty Catholic sexuality? The answer, of course, is probably not—no more, at least, than it needs a stupendously undanceable "12-inch dance remix" of his 1985 single "Keeping the Faith," or an extra 94 seconds of cocktail jazz featured on the "unfaded version" of the 1978 album track "Zanzibar." There's very little that's not included on this gargantuan collection, comprising 66 tracks, nearly five hours of music and liner notes more extensive than the *Oxford Bible Concordance*. Even the Piano Man's most hardcore fans are liable to get glassy-eyed somewhere around hour three, when an "alternate version" of Joel's 1997 cover of Bob Dylan's "Make You Feel My Love" crops up.

Joel is one of pop's most frustrating performers. His skills are beyond dispute: He's a fluid pianist, a talented singer and a songwriter with lavish, well-nigh McCartneyesque melodic gifts. In his late-'70s hits (notably "Movin' Out" and "Big Shot," both here in live renditions) he combined classicist craftsmanship with an unmistakable fuck-off attitude, carving a niche as the belligerent poet laureate of New York suburbia. But Joel never sounded quite convincing as a rocker; he's far better playing the old-fashioned pop balladeer, as on the sumptuous "Until the Night" and the bluesy Ray Charles homage "New York State of Mind."

His biggest problem is a deadly case of High Seriousness. The guy desperately wants to be an *artiste*, and *My Lives* makes it clear that this is nothing new. From his late-'60s tenure fronting the heavy metal power duo Attila straight through to the pseudo-philosophical, phony-gospel muck of his last big hit, "The River of Dreams," Joel's music had always been soul-killingly self-serious and awash in pretension, a fact thrown into stark relief on his recent co-headlining tours with that irrepressible party-starter, Elton John. Joel's pretentiousness reached something of an endgame with his 1993 retirement from pop songwriting to focus on classical compositions for solo piano—the examples of which included here bear about as much resemblance to Chopin as the "Keeping the Faith" dance remix does to dance music.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "Until the Night," "An Innocent Man," "Movin' Out" (Live)

UNDER THE INFLUENCES

BILLY JOEL EXPLAINS HOW HE CAME TO ADORE GIRLISH HAIR AND ENVY JAMES BROWN

THE FIRST RECORD I BOUGHT WAS *Time Out* by Dave Brubeck. It was probably three bucks. I was flabbergasted by the time signatures. I'd liked jazz prior to that, but this was a quantum leap.

I WAS WAY INTO R&B: Otis Redding and Ray Charles, who I worked with. He was my generation's Frank Sinatra, always changing.

THEN THE BEATLES CAME AND—BOOM!—HIT ME LIKE A TON OF BRICKS. They played their own instruments, they sang, they had hair like girls.

WHEN I WAS 12 OR 13, I HAD A PLAYBOY BUNNY POSTER I took down when my mom was going to come into my room.

I DIDN'T HAVE A TV WHEN I WAS A KID, so movies were a big deal. Black and white, angry-man English movies—*The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *Billy Liar*. These were blue-collar guys. Again, just like the Beatles.

MY PARENTS GOT DIVORCED PRETTY YOUNG, and my mother was somewhat shunned in our suburb. We were used to being outsiders, so living a different life by becoming a working musician at age 16 didn't seem that unusual.

The funny perception about me is that I grew up in piano bars—I only did that for six months. From 14 on, I was in rock bands. I loved Cream, Zeppelin. **I WAS IN A HEAVY METAL BAND CALLED ATTILA.** Looking back now, I think we sucked.

ONE OF THE FIRST CONCERTS I EVER WENT TO WAS JAMES BROWN AT THE APOLLO. I remember going home really mad I wasn't black and poor. *STEVE KANDELL*

"Fine. You drive."

TOP: EVERETT COLLECTION; BOTTOM: RAINER HOSCH

New Edition sign on for *March of the Penguins II*.

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

THE DOORS

LIVE IN PHILADELPHIA '70 ✪✪

RHINO HANDMADE

Fresh from making *Morrison Hotel*, the Doors were on an upswing in 1970. Robby Krieger's slashing guitar makes sparks fly, but Jim Morrison's blowhard persona brings the music crashing to earth. A driving cover of Elvis Presley's "Mystery Train" almost achieves the elusive fusion of poetic and profane they pursued so obsessively.

BUDDY GUY & JUNIOR WELLS

BUDDY GUY & JUNIOR WELLS PLAY THE BLUES ✪✪✪

RHINO HANDMADE

Eric Clapton honored two of his Chicago blues idols by co-producing and occasionally playing on their 1972 album, now featuring 13 extra tracks. For all the crisp licks, Guy (guitar) and Wells (harmonica) often take a relaxed approach that lacks the fire of their best work, though the intriguing "Checkin' Up on My Baby" flirts with hard funk.

NEW EDITION

GOLD ✪✪✪ ½

HIP-O

The cute Boston teens of 1984's "Cool It Now" seemed to be a disposable Jackson 5 update, but they went on to produce a slew of tough, grown-up R&B, together and separately. Note especially their steamy '90s reunion single "Hit Me Off" and Bobby Brown's 1988 New Jack Swing masterpiece, "My Prerogative," lately soiled by Britney Spears.

? AND THE MYSTERIANS

THE BEST OF ✪✪✪ ½

ABKO

Riding an eerie organ riff, sneering, shades-wearing singer ? (born Rudy Martinez) attained garage-rock immortality in 1966 with "96 Tears." If nothing else from the Chicano quintet matches it, the pounding raveup "Can't Get Enough of You, Baby" (covered by Smash Mouth) raises dumb repetition to a fine art.

THE ROLLING STONES

RARITIES ✪✪

VIRGIN

Exciting B-sides mingle with pointless remixes and forgettable live cuts on yet another half-baked Stones compilation. From the Mick Taylor era, 1971's furious "Let It Rock" stands as one of their hottest Chuck Berry covers; on 1989's slinky "Fancy Man Blues," Mick Jagger battles old age with a wonderfully trashy harmonica solo.

ANGIE STONE

STONE HITS: THE VERY BEST OF ANGIE STONE ✪✪✪ ½

J RECORDS

Neo-soul goddess Stone describes romance in warm, caressing tones that suggest a disciple of Gladys Knight, though one armed with modern, edgier beats. Flanked by guests Anthony Hamilton and Alicia Keys, she prefers earthy directness to diva flash, waxing hypnotic on the beautiful "No More Rain (In This Cloud)" and ripping masculine insecurity in the glowering "Pissed Off."

VARIOUS ARTISTS

A QUIET REVOLUTION: 30 YEARS OF WINDHAM HILL ✪

WINDHAM HILL/LEGACY

Notorious for the soul-killing New Age music of pianist George Winston and guitarist Michael Hedges, Windham Hill actually offers more than bleached-out instrumentals. Signs of life on the unbelievably long four-disc set come from the funky Subdudes, engaging Portuguese-language singer Cesaria Evora and maverick folkie Jane Siberry. Otherwise, avoid like the flu.

New Order: Underwhelmed by *Blender*'s review.

didn't catch *Dogma*, the movie's religioso-psychedelic closing dirge, "Still," is a welcome discovery, cleverly written from God's point of view. Even better is her Cole Porter cover from *De-Lovely*, a full-throated "Let's Do It, Let's Fall In Love" that suggests she's one of the rare singers who could do a covers album and make that old mid-career stunt glowingly original.

KEN TUCKER

DOWNLOAD: "Thank U," "Still," "Let's Do It, Let's Fall In Love"

RICKY NELSON

GREATEST HITS ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

The only dreamy, blue-eyed sitcom-star-turned-rockabilly-singer cherished by Bob Dylan

Critics—and even Bob Dylan—have long revered Ricky Nelson as a breakaway hero among '50s teen idols: The unexpected hillbilly twang lurking inside his polished croon, and the barbs on guitarist James Burton's exquisite licks, flaunt a credibility that Fabian and Frankie Avalon can only eye hungrily from afar. But Nelson's music, while better, is also in this day and age a lot less interesting. His well-played, well-realized odes to steady dates and soda-pop romance unintentionally reinforce an image of the '50s as a time of anxiety-free comfort and stability—life as an episode of Nelson's own sitcom, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. This singles collection, marking the twentieth anniversary of Nelson's death in a plane crash, is oldies Valium. Pop it and feel good about myths that have been begging to be punctured for decades.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: "Travelin' Man," "Lonesome Town"

NEW ORDER

SINGLES ✪✪✪✪

WARNER BROS./RHINO

British electroids' humpteenth compilation is blissfully simple

New Order's incorrigible habit of pouring old wine into new bottles reached its nadir in 2002 with an erratic boxset (*Retro*) and a flimsy single-disc retrospective (*International*) jinxed by whimsical selections and nonsensical sequencing. By contrast, *Singles* emanates unflappable authority. Chronologically

BURIED TREASURE UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS

NENEH CHERRY

RAW LIKE SUSHI ✪✪✪✪

VIRGIN, 1989

As female rappers started declaring independence, Neneh Cherry was the most assertive girl on the block. Talking frankly about skeezers and motherhood, she exudes a sexy maturity beyond her 25 years. Flirting with dance, pop and hip-hop, Cherry refused to be any boy's toy. Along the way she was a beacon for all the Missy Elliotts and Lauryn Hills who followed.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD: "Buffalo Stance," "Outré Risqué Locomotive," "So Here I Come"

Neneh Cherry loves being held at gunpoint.

NEW EDITION: RON WOLFSON/LFI; NEW ORDER: RICHARD HAUGHTON/COURTESY WARNER BROS. RECORDS; CHERRY: ANDREW CATLIN/LFI

presenting the original versions of the quartet's 29 singles (plus two excellent B-sides), it sets out the stages of their unparalleled journey from battered postpunk survivors ("Ceremony") to electronic pioneers ("Blue Monday") to pop craftsmen ("True Faith") to dance-rock elders ("Crystal"). While New Order's albums indulge their wayward streak, the keyword here is consistency. Whether appropriating bleeding-edge New York electro ("Confusion") or hooking up with the 1990 England soccer squad ("World in Motion"), their gift for melody never wavers. A master class in exploring the infinite potential of the pop song.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD: "Temptation," "1963," "Regret"

THE ROOTS

HOME GROWN! THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS, VOL. 1 ✪✪✪

HOME GROWN! THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS, VOL. 2 ✪✪✪

GEFFEN/OKAYPLAYER

Proof that rap's best live band knew what they were doing the first time around

Before Kanye West, the Roots were hip-hop's great consensus-builders. Mainstream MCs like Jay-Z dug their organic, laid-back cool; backpackers loved their jazzbo pedigree and utter inability to sell records. Exactly whose fault that is will be determined when they switch labels next year, but in the meantime we get this contract-fulfilling retrospective: two separate discs, compiled by drummer/group honcho ?uestlove, boasting a vault's worth of B-sides and remixes and almost no hits. Even their two biggest songs aren't really here: "You Got Me," an icily sexy duet with Erykah Badu, is now Badu-less, while "The Seed 2.0" has been transformed from hooky rock-guitar sex jam to noodly 16-minute medley. Is the title some kind of joke? Beginners would do better to pick up *Things Fall Apart* or *Phrenology*.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "What You Want" feat. Jaguar Wright (Vol. 1); "Break You Off (Dub/Sound Check at Bogart's Cincinnati, OH, 2003)" (Vol. 2)

CAT STEVENS

GOLD ✪✪✪

A&M/UNIVERSAL

Before a U.S. Cabinet official accused him of having terrorist ties, this Brit strummed a lethal acoustic guitar

What a career, going from a trembling-voiced folkie on the *Billboard* charts to Islamic convert on the no-fly list. You can call him Yusuf Islam now, but back when his posse called him Cat Stevens, he was responsible in the early '70s for oh-so-serious, not-so-deep celestial pop tunes. The best of these succeed in rendering innocence without pimping it. Stevens wrote limpid pop hits that were half British Invasion drive and half folkie simplicity—he was Donovan with stubble, and staying power. And if this two-CD set's new song, "Indian Ocean," feels painfully earnest, songs like "The First Cut Is the Deepest," "Wild World" and "Peace Train" are folk music fit for the jukebox. He may have defended the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, but this set speaks loudest: Make fluff, not war.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "Here Comes My Baby," "Where Do the Children Play?"

Cat Stevens: Turtlenecks good, godless infidels bad.

STEVENS: BARRIE WENTZELL

VARIOUS ARTISTS

12 CLASSIC 45s ✪✪✪✪

ACE OF HEARTS

A jukebox of Boston garage rock

Collegiate Boston in the late 1970s had a close-knit punk scene, and the Ace of Hearts label nurtured it. The city didn't embrace the Ramones' NYC blare, but it was all for back-to-basics and brevity: 25 songs fit on this CD. Label head Rick Harte's production was downright analytical, getting a sinewy, no-frills clarity from his bands; they sound as if they're performing live in silent spaces. There were retro tendencies in the organ-pumped garage-rock of the Lyres and the psychedelic drone of the Neats; there was punk tension in the jabbing guitars of Mission of Burma. Like any scene, the output wasn't all timeless, but on Ace of Hearts, even the also-rans were hard-headed and succinct.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD: Mission of Burma, "Academy Fight Song"; the Neats, "Caraboo"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

CRUNK HITS ✪✪✪✪

TVT

A little bit of "Whaat?!" and a whole lot of "Okaay!!"

Sure, you got your blazin' hits and your slammin' jams. But when you absolutely have to make a hollering moron out of everyone in the room? Crunk: Accept no substitutes. This festive CD compiles gems from that goblet of bass-pummelling party-rap minted by Lil Jon and his cronies. The disc values chart-toppers over riot-inducers—Usher's "Yeah!," Chingy's "Right Thurr"—so after Trick Daddy's Ozzy-sampling rumble call "Let's Go," the energy ebbs from balls-out insane to merely buck-wild, though songs are consistently glutteal, brandy-soaked and imaginatively profane throughout (see Khia's oral tutorial "My Neck, My Back (Lick It)"). Lil Jon's *Kings of Crunk* may kick more ass, but to roam the peaks of pop at its most joyfully idiotic and obscene, this is the joint.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: Trick Daddy, "Let's Go"; Chingy, "Right Thurr"

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST REISSUES FROM THE PAST MONTHS

BEASTIE BOYS

SOLID GOLD HITS

CAPITOL

New York trendsetters were also great hitmakers, as heard on this funk and rap singles bonanza.

DESTINY'S CHILD

#1'S

COLUMBIA

In ballads or dance tracks, demanding or giving, they were fun and poised. If only they hadn't dumped us.

BLINK-182

GREATEST HITS

GEFFEN

Three West Coast delinquents who started with masturbation jokes, then grew into punk adulthood.

JOHN FOGERTY

THE LONG ROAD HOME

FANTASY

The man who nearly invented American roots rock compiles a jukebox full of riffs and tough lessons.

JOHNNY CASH

THE LEGEND OF JOHNNY CASH

HIP-O/SONY

The one-stop solution to a glut of Cash reissues: 21 raw songs of sin and hurt, covering his whole career.

TALKING HEADS

TALKING HEADS

RHINO/WARNER BROS.

A big brick of scratchy guitars and yelpy vocals from New Yorkers who made smart sound sexy.

Gwen: "Fetish? What fetish?"

DOUBTLESS

ON HER FIRST SOLO TOUR, MERCURIAL FASHION PLATE CARVES OUT AN IDENTITY OR NINE

GWEN STEFANI

HOLLYWOOD BOWL
HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

OCTOBER 21, 2005

✪✪✪

"BUSH IS IN town!" said an audience member breathlessly, by way of explaining the electric feeling in the violet Los Angeles evening. It was easy to imagine for a second she meant the half-remembered Brit grunge gang featuring Gwen Stefani's husband, since it seemed that the night, the city, the whole world turned around Ms. Stefani, Orange County's juiciest couture. But alas, it was only news of the President, whose latest contribution to disaster was the nightmare traffic that had half of the 17,000 ticketholders hurrying in late enough to miss the Black Eyed Peas' frenetic opening set.

If the Peas are a sort of elaborate ploy to make a cartoony white chick seem funky, they fit the evening: That's been the headliner's shtick since the former Just a Girl and her sometime bandmates bailed on blue-eyed ska and started hanging around with Dr. Dre, the Neptunes and similar funk chief executives back around the beginning of the Bush era. But tonight there would be no No Doubt (either onstage or in the set list), and no doubt about Stefani's solo starpower or her status as local hero. "Orange County, Hollywood, same fucking thing," she insisted early on. Then, gazing out at the throng that had sold out the show in a reported 20 minutes: "This is fucking crazy right now. Who the fuck am I?"

Good question. Stefani changes so swiftly she can only be change itself. As she rippled effortlessly through a show exactly as long as a full-length compact disc, she disguised the unfortunate facts—she can neither dance a lick nor stay on pitch—with the spectacle of her own mercurial shifts, punctuated by almost as many costume changes as there were songs.

The set featured the full dozen songs on her solo debut, *Love. Angel. Music. Baby.*, and two vampy new tracks, "Wind It Up" and "Orange County Girl." Here she played the modish orientalist, hitting the stage with "Harajuku Girls" done up in a white Goth-Lolita look; there she toyed with mid-'80s feminist cheesecake, staging "The Real Thing" in front of a video recalling Madonna's "Cherish" as her vocals recalled Cyndi Lauper on an off night. For a second this mixture seemed to capture the star perfectly, the polka-dot-com perfection of digitized retro. The next thing you know, she'd shrugged on a zebra-tone tracksuit that hovered between comedy and where-can-I-get-one, and was flirting through "Crash," all-ages charisma on blast: homegirl but not homebody, sexpot but never a sexbot.

If she wasn't all things to everybody, she was at least Cher: The Next Generation, fashioned by gypsies, tramps and couturiers. If the music resisted her, she had a studio-sharp quintet to help her through. If she seemed uncomfortable in her boogie shoes, the eight dancers—four Japanimated women with fake fake names, and a four-man breaking crew with real fake

STEFANI: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM (2)

Gwen dances cheek to cheek.

names—got her freak on by proxy, and they were awesome. What's more, through all the glitz and ditz, she seemed—no, really!—to believe in love.

For all the good-timing of repro-perfect "Hollaback Girl" (during which she auto-deleted the cursing, the better to resemble radio's safe space), for all the electric bubblepop of "Rich Girl," the latest queen of Toontown was at her best as a true romantic. Her Prince imitation, "Long Way to Go," (co-written with Andre 3000 of Outkast) offers up civil rights as a route to two-tone interracial kiss-kiss, and Stefani caught the thwarted optimism of love elegantly. Even better was her run-through of "Cool," a smash ballad her voice barely followed but her spirit led to the promised land.

Just before that she tried to settle the question of what kind of young female she was, exactly. "I'm just an Orange County girl," she vamped before strolling into "Cool," "living in an extraordinary world." This was either humility or a knowing celebration of how far one can get with little but charm and a million-dollar stage set—a true Hollywood story, one that never seems to change.

JANE DARK

Not pictured: cute female Japanese backup dancers in Catholic-school garb.

FULL METAL JACKET

LONG ADORED AS A GREAT LIVE BAND, OLD-FASHIONED KENTUCKY ROCKERS SEEM READY FOR THE BIG TIME

MY MORNING JACKET

THE SHOWBOX
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

NOVEMBER 4, 2005

✪✪✪✪

A FLOCK OF OWL figurines has descended upon the stage of this decaying dancehall for My Morning Jacket's set; they stand sentry on every amp, glass eyes glimmering. From the first bass-pulse of "Wordless Chorus," the band reels around in a graceful frenzy, playing tag with the sleepy shadows cast by gently psychedelic stage lights. Jim James tilts his head back and wails—a joyful salute, not quite on the note, but so blissful that it grazes perfection.

The crowd greets his falsetto peal with a roar. They're expecting a night of dazzling peaks, given MMJ's status as the cult band most likely to become arena-worthy. Renowned for dreamlike shows full of euphoric band interplay, the quintet has grown more focused and songful since guitarist Carl Broemel and keyboardist Bo Koster enlisted for the band's fourth studio album, Z. Nights in small rooms like this one, packed to capacity, may soon become rare as MMJ evolves into the next Neil Young and Crazy Horse—or perhaps the next Phish.

Call them psychedelic or Southern, but this Kentucky crew challenge categories by finding the ways they connect. "We're here to tenderize you," James announces. Ballads like "Dondante" and boogie bacchanals like "One Big Holiday" sink into the skins of listeners until everyone is a mass of swaying flesh and open emotion.

MMJ's benign derangement makes every show an event. The 1,100 fans who fly the horns as Broemel makes hay of Who riffs and Allman Brothers chord progressions, and slam-dance when drummer Patrick Hallahan initiates a metal meltdown during "Gideon," exude the aura of the faithful. They trust MMJ to lift them up, just as the long-hairs of the '70s lifted up their parents, and to bring them back to earth intact.

Though MMJ's ramshackle interplay marks them as indie, this is as far from punk as it gets. These revisionists want to build something new, not rip everything apart; creative introspection envelops them even as they make their super-rock moves. Witnessing this music being born anew gives MMJ fans hope. "Just believe and you can do," exhorts their hero as the band careens around like surfers tapping the source. James steps to the microphone again and lets forth a bellow, safe and mighty as he rides his wave.

ANN POWERS

HOW'D YOU LIKE THE SHOW?

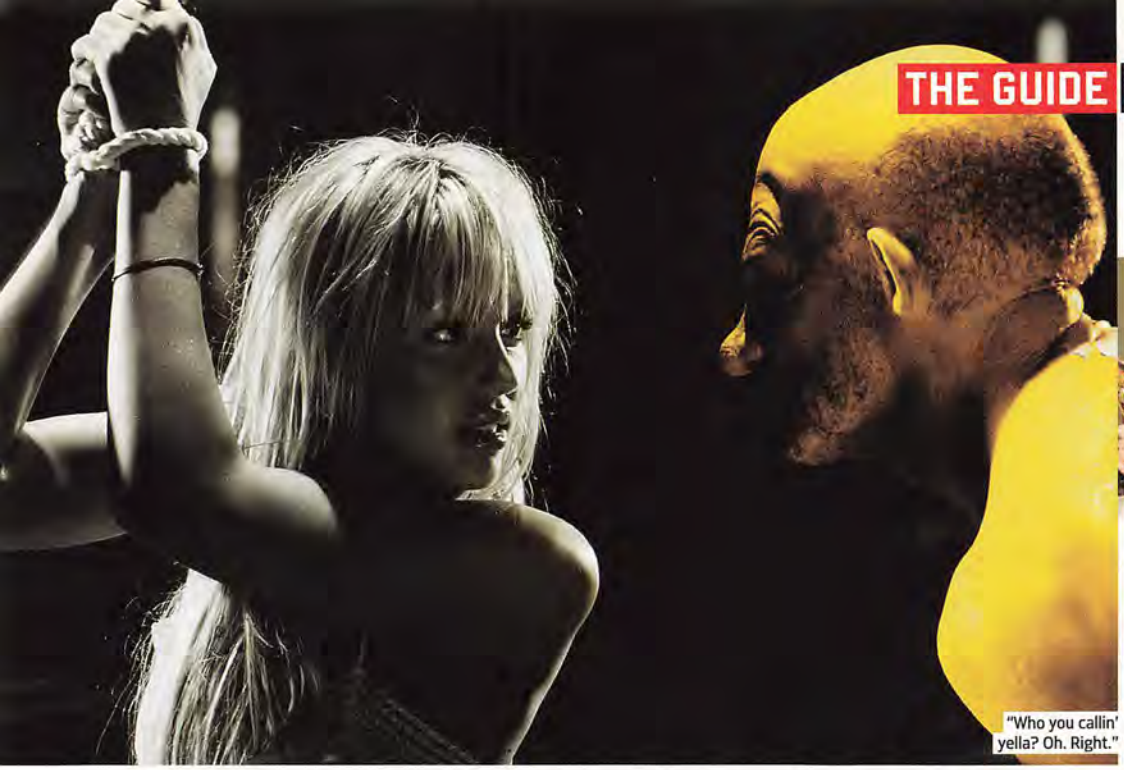
"They're in-your-face Southern rock with attitude. And they're hairy. At one point I turned to my wife and said, 'This is like Neil Young and Crazy Horse circa 1975.'"

DAVID BROTHERTON, 37
COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT
SEATTLE

"Jim James is pretty much the best vocalist of all time. Well, at least of my lifetime. When he shakes his head fast, I'm pretty much possessed with whatever he says."

TIMOTHY PARKER-HERMAN, 25, COFFEE STORE EMPLOYEE
SEATTLE

MORNING JACKET: ROBB D. COHEN/RETNA LTD.; FANS: ANN POWERS (2)



"Who you callin' yella? Oh. Right."

Steve Carell: comic's comic.

MOVIES OF THE YEAR

SIX REASONS TO LEAVE THE HOUSE IN 2005 BY CLARK COLLIS

KICKASSEST MOVIE OF THE YEAR

SIN CITY

For this comic book adaptation that truly adapted its source material, director Robert Rodriguez went black-and-white and recruited *Sin City* creator Frank Miller as co-director to better ape the graphic novels' noir-ish vibe. Of course, given the assorted acts of violence on display, a color version would probably have lasted around 90 seconds after the censors had put away their scissors. But even more than its brilliantly crafted mayhem, the appeal of *Sin City* lies in its stellar cast, from Bruce Willis's world-weary copper to the now facially freakish Mickey Rourke's mercifully makeup-heavy turn as hero-psycho Marv.

BEST MOVIE TO WATCH STANDING UP

MURDERBALL

Why would you want to watch the year's most compelling documentary upright? Because you can, fortunately—unlike its quadriplegic rugby-playing stars. Not that Mark Zupan & co. have any use for your sympathy, as *Murderball* proved—*unless* you're a woman and it's going to help get you in the sack.

BEST MOVIE TO MAKE YOU FEEL OK ABOUT BEING A 39-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN

THE 40-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN

Judd Apatow's superlative sex comedy narrowly beats out *Wedding Crashers* as the most successful laugh machine of the year on the three all-important grounds of humor, character development and cast members' willingness to have body hair violently removed for our viewing pleasure.

MOVIE YOUR PET BEAR WON'T LIKE

GRIZZLY MAN

2005 was a vintage year for documentaries, with *The Aristocrats*, *Inside Deep Throat*, *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* and the aforementioned *Murderball* outentertaining nearly all their made-up competitors. But none could top Werner Herzog's film about a guy who obsessively loved bears right up to, and possibly including, the point where he got eaten by one.

MOVIE YOUR PET SQUID WON'T LIKE

OLDBOY

Korean director Chan-wook Park's beautiful, perverse revenge tragedy was not only the best foreign film of the past 12 months but the best horror movie too. And the best flick to feature someone eating a live octopus. Honorable mention: *The Squid and the Whale*.

BEST SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER TO FEATURE A JOKE ABOUT SPELUNKING

BATMAN BEGINS

Actually, Christopher Nolan's taut, rubber-nipple-free examination of the Caped Crusader's twisted origins was the finest summer blockbuster, period. Christian Bale played Batman perfectly as a man hellbent on beating the crap out of baddies to avenge the death of his parents—*and* because he just kinda liked it.

WORST MOVIE OF THE YEAR

CURSED

Despite quantity far outstripping quality, horror-flick-wise, in '05 Wes Craven's coughed-up hairball of a werewolf flick still stood head and shoulders below the crapulous likes of *House of Wax*, *The Amityville Horror* and the non-horror-but-still-horrific *Bewitched*. Craven would redeem himself with the fabulously lean thriller *Red Eye*. Christina Ricci, Shannon Elizabeth, Joshua Jackson and in all probability the film's key grip, on the other hand, would not.

A Bizarro-world Bob Dylan regrets hocking guitar.

TOP FIVE MUSIC DVDS OF 2005

FOUR TOP DOCS, ONE BON SCOTT

1 NO DIRECTION HOME: BOB DYLAN

In this officially endorsed Dylan doc, Zimmy revealed only so much. But the vintage footage and Martin Scorsese's calculated direction vaulted this four-hour epic into instant-classic status.

2 METALLICA: SOME KIND OF MONSTER

Therapy. Rehab. Modern-art auctions. *Monster* had everything for the diehard Metallica fan—*and* for those who think the band are self-obsessed blowhards.

3 THE FEARLESS FREAKS: FEATURING THE FLAMING LIPS

From Wayne Coyne's *Mad Max*–style teen sports endeavors to Steven Drozd's (on-screen) narcotic use, *Fearless Freaks* revealed the Lips to be even more twisted than was previously thought.

4 END OF THE CENTURY: THE STORY OF THE RAMONES

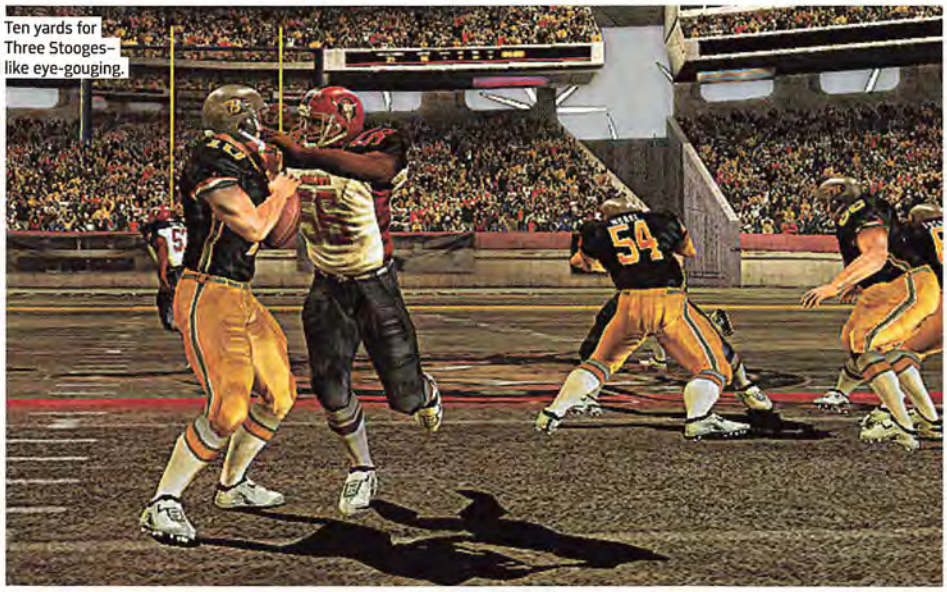
Few bands were so suited to playing together as the Ramones—or so ill-suited to being stuck in a van together. *Century* illuminates both the debt owed the punk godfathers and their dysfunctionality.

5 AC/DC: FAMILY JEWELS

For those about to rock, we salute you. Also worthy of salutation: the people responsible for this hilarious and utterly rock-tastic 40-strong collection of promo clips and live tracks featuring impish maniac Bon Scott.

SIN CITY: COURTESY DIMENSION FILMS; VIRGIN: SUZANNE HANOVER/UNIVERSAL PICTURES; DYLAN: (C) SONY BMG ENTERTAINMENT PHOTO ARCHIVE

BUH-BYE '05



Ten yards for Three Stooges–like eye-gouging.

GAMES OF THE YEAR

RELIVE THE REASONS FOR YOUR CALLOUSED THUMBS BY GABE SORIA

GAME THAT MAKES LEARNING FUN!

GOD OF WAR *(SONY, PS2)*: Red-eyed revenge–against a god, no less–is the name of the game in this ballsy and bloodily compelling action fantasy set in the age of Greek myth.

GAME BEST ENJOYED UNDER THE INFLUENCE, NOT THAT WE CONDONE THAT SORT OF THING

A hearty, uncoordinated salute to **SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS** *(SONY, PS2)*, whose titanic monster-slaying action was like a stoner-metal album cover come to life, minus the seeds and stems in the spine.

THE "GAMES BASED ON COMICS DON'T HAVE TO SUCK" AWARD

Comic geeks everywhere soiled their XXL sweatpants for **THE INCREDIBLE HULK: ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION** *(VIVENDI UNIVERSAL, PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE)*, which delivered on the promise of its title, distilling everything cool about the Hulk–namely his tendency to lay waste to entire cities–into a compulsively playable time-suck.

GAME THAT'LL TIDE YOU OVER UNTIL THE NEXT SEASON OF *DEADWOOD*

GUN *(ACTIVISION, PS2, XBOX, XBOX 360, GAMECUBE, PC)*, a.k.a. *Grand Theft: Stagecoach*. The makers of this free-roaming Western adventure thought of everything, including Kris Kristofferson *and* an option that lets you scalp your Inj–er, Native American–enemies.

SPORTS GAMES FOR THE REST OF US

For the non-fan, a rules-heavy sports game can be as much fun as calculus, so be thankful for **FIFA STREET** *(EA, PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE)*, which relocated soccer from stadiums to international ghettoes and scored it with worldwide beats, and **BLITZ: THE LEAGUE** *(MIDWAY, PS2, XBOX)* which turned pro football away from licensed niceness and reached gleefully violent, 'roid-raging heights.

GAME THAT'S MORE DISTURBING THAN IT NEEDS TO BE

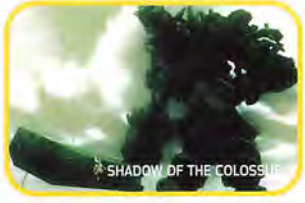
JAMES BOND 007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE *(EA, PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE)* was a pleasingly retro entry in the Bond game franchise, complete with rocket packs and Istanbul and Lotte Lenya. But hearing Sir Sean Connery's sepulchral voice of 2005 issuing from his circa-1963 electronic likeness is just plain creepy.

THE "DAMN, DIDN'T I JUST PLAY THIS?" AWARD

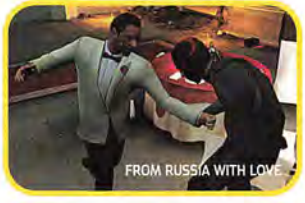
Couldn't tell the difference between all the "ride pimpin'" car-racing games currently cluttering the shelves? Us neither. From **MIDNIGHT CLUB 3** to **NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2** to **L.A. RUSH**, our eyes now immediately glaze over at the mere mention of "custom rims." We're looking at you, Xzibit.

GOD OF WAR

GUN



SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS



FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

INCREDIBLE HULK

MIDNIGHT CLUB

Led Zep in concert, bell bottoms.

ZEPPELIN: NEAL PRESTON/CORBIS

TOP FIVE BOOKS

BECAUSE READING IS FUNDAMENTAL

1 **CAN'T STOP, WON'T STOP**
JEFF CHANG *(ST MARTIN'S PRESS)*
Starting in Yankee Stadium's bleachers and ending at a Seattle WTO protest, Chang's meticulous, cynicism-free reflection on hip-hop is an imaginative, free-associative wonder that's more than a book about rap–it's a moving, ambitious story about the transformative powers of culture.

2 **LED ZEPPELIN IV**
ERIK DAVIS *(CONTINUUM INT'L)*
An elegant, mindbogglingly researched salute to Zep's elusive fourth album, so vast in scope–exploring occultism and media theory one second, fishy groupie scandals and Bonzo's sumo clobber the next–it's amazing this all fits in a book barely larger than an iPod.

3 **RIP IT UP AND START AGAIN: POSTPUNK 1978–1984**
SIMON REYNOLDS *(FABER & FABER)*
Focusing on still-revered, genre-busting bands like Talking Heads, Devo and Gang of Four, this import traces how big-brained art-school renegades bridged the gap between ragged '70s punk and made-for-MTV pop.

4 **TURN THE BEAT AROUND: THE SECRET HISTORY OF DISCO**
PETER SHAPIRO *(FABER & FABER)*
Combating the caricature of disco as one big coke-fueled fashion faux-pas, Shapiro traces '70s dance music's roots in soul and sociology, revealing more depth and subtlety than KC and the Sunshine Band's *oeuvre* might suggest.

5 **DREAM BOOGIE: THE TRIUMPH OF SAM COOKE**
PETER GURALNICK *(LITTLE, BROWN)*
The story of this soul legend's meteoric rise and sordid fall serves as a history of R&B and the struggles of black musicians writ small. But, at 700 pages, not *that* small.

WIN THIS THINGY!

OH, SURE, YOU COULD CORRECTLY FILL IN THIS MONTH'S CROSSWORD JUST FOR THE SATISFACTION OF DOING SO. BUT HOW MUCH MORE SATISFIED WILL YOU FEEL KNOWING YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO WIN A TAO WIRELESS MEDIA PLAYER? QUITE A BIT, WE IMAGINE!

PENCIL ME IN

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 24 across!

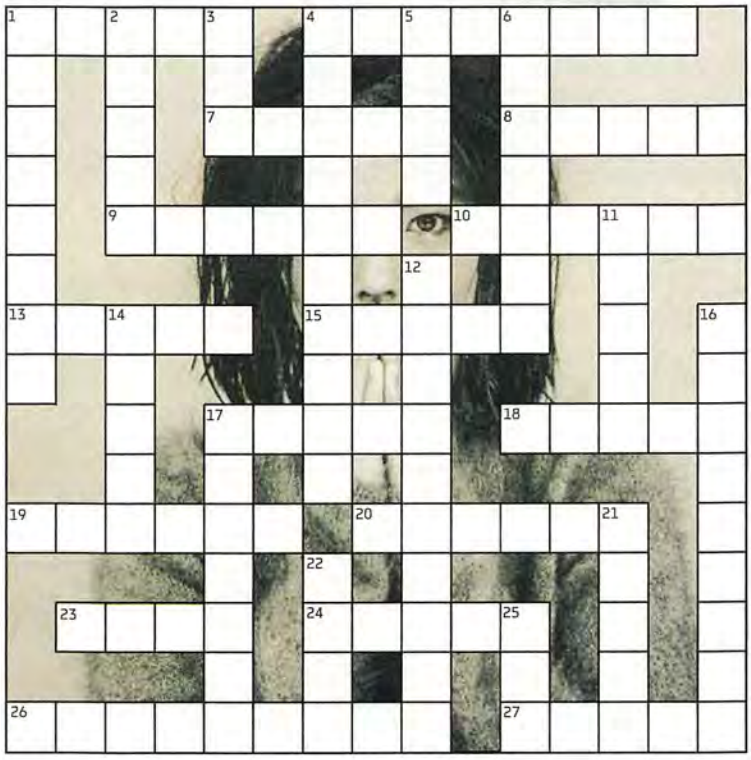
BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

1 Model/sex symbol who is launching her own label
4 2005 single from the Strokes
7 Lennon said he wasn't even the best drummer in the Beatles
8 He did a last dance with Mary Jane
9 "Let Me Hold You" rapper
10 They are all on drugs
13 Her last CD, *Rebirth*, was D.O.A.
15 "Forever in Blue _____" (Neil Diamond hit)
17 GN'R epic "_____ War"
18 "I'm Sprung" rapper
19 He spoke in class today
20 They're the kings of rock; there is none higher
23 "Big" cult band fronted by Alex Chilton
24 Appropriately, Björk's first CD
26 He shot the sheriff, but he did not shoot the deputy
27 John who thinks your body is a wonderland

DOWN

1 This Houston rapper is sittin' sidewayz (two words)
2 Grammy genre in which Alicia Keys won in 2005 (three words)
3 Elton John's title
4 Lead singer who is living on a prayer (three words)
5 Maiden that Sharon Osbourne loathes
6 "_____ Yourself" (1989 Madge hit)
11 Mother of the Mothers of Invention
12 Punk-pop outfit named for lesser *Simpsons* character
14 Pottymouthed singer turned MILF Liz
16 His father has seen fire and he's seen rain (two words)
17 Coheed's pal
21 "Shake It Off" chanteuse
22 Simon's show, for short
25 C&W's McGraw



→ Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018

CELEBRITY CHESS

ROUND 9 PITBULL VS. BLENDER

POP STARS aren't known as cerebral types, so *Blender* challenged the whole lot of 'em to a game of chess, hoping for an easy, ego-boosting victory. Each month, a different star will make a move, and we'll respond until someone wins or we lose interest. *M.I.A.M.I.* rapper **PITBULL**, who comes from somewhere in Florida we think, steps up to the board this month and dares to challenge our rook-taking skillz.

PITBULL'S MOVE (WHITE)
PAWN TAKES PAWN
BLENDER'S MOVE (BLACK)
KNIGHT TAKES PAWN

Former U.S. Chess Federation president **Don Schultz** says:
(ON PITBULL) Prevents black from playing pawn to e4, which would seriously limit white's mobility.
(ON *BLENDER*) Wins back the pawn and maintains black's advantage.

COME BACK NEXT MONTH AS THE EGGHEAD SMACKDOWN CONTINUES!

PITBULL: CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE

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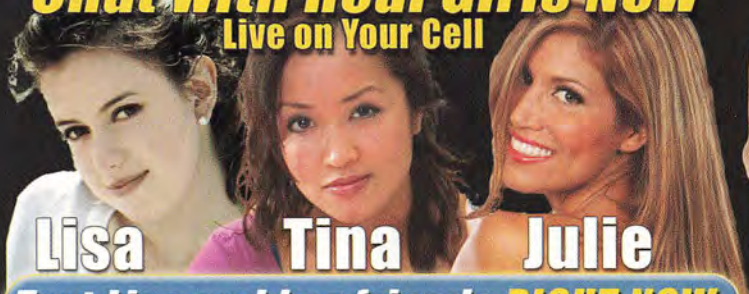

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24132	Gwen Stefani - Hollaback Girl	24245	Staind - Right Here
24130	Gorillaz - Feel Good, Inc.	24244	Papa Roach - Take Me
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24162	Keisha - Drama on the Line
24160	Too Short - Answer your pheazy
24168	Bubbler with Exhale -
24174	Police Scanner -
24172	Lots of Shooting -
27169	Car Alarm -
24171	Female Scream -
24272	Sultry - Girl Moaning
24170	Sultry - Female Pleasure
24274	Sultry - Giggling with pleasure

Real Song Tones ...in the syle of...

24116	Anna Nalick - Breathe (2 AM)
24116	Franz Ferdinand - Take Me Out
24119	Jet - Look What You've Done
24120	Kelly Clarkson - Behind These Hazel Eyes
24122	My Chemical Romance - Helena
24126	The Killers - Somebody Told Me
24112	AC/DC - Back in Black
24114	Beastie Boys - Fight for your Right
24121	KISS - Rock and Roll all Night
24118	Guns and Roses - Paradise City
24125	Snoop - Gin and Juice
24123	Naughty by Nature - Hip Hop Hooray
24115	Cypress Hill - Insane in the Brain
24229	Led Zeppelin - Kashmir
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24252	Blink 182 - The Rock Show

THE TOP TEN

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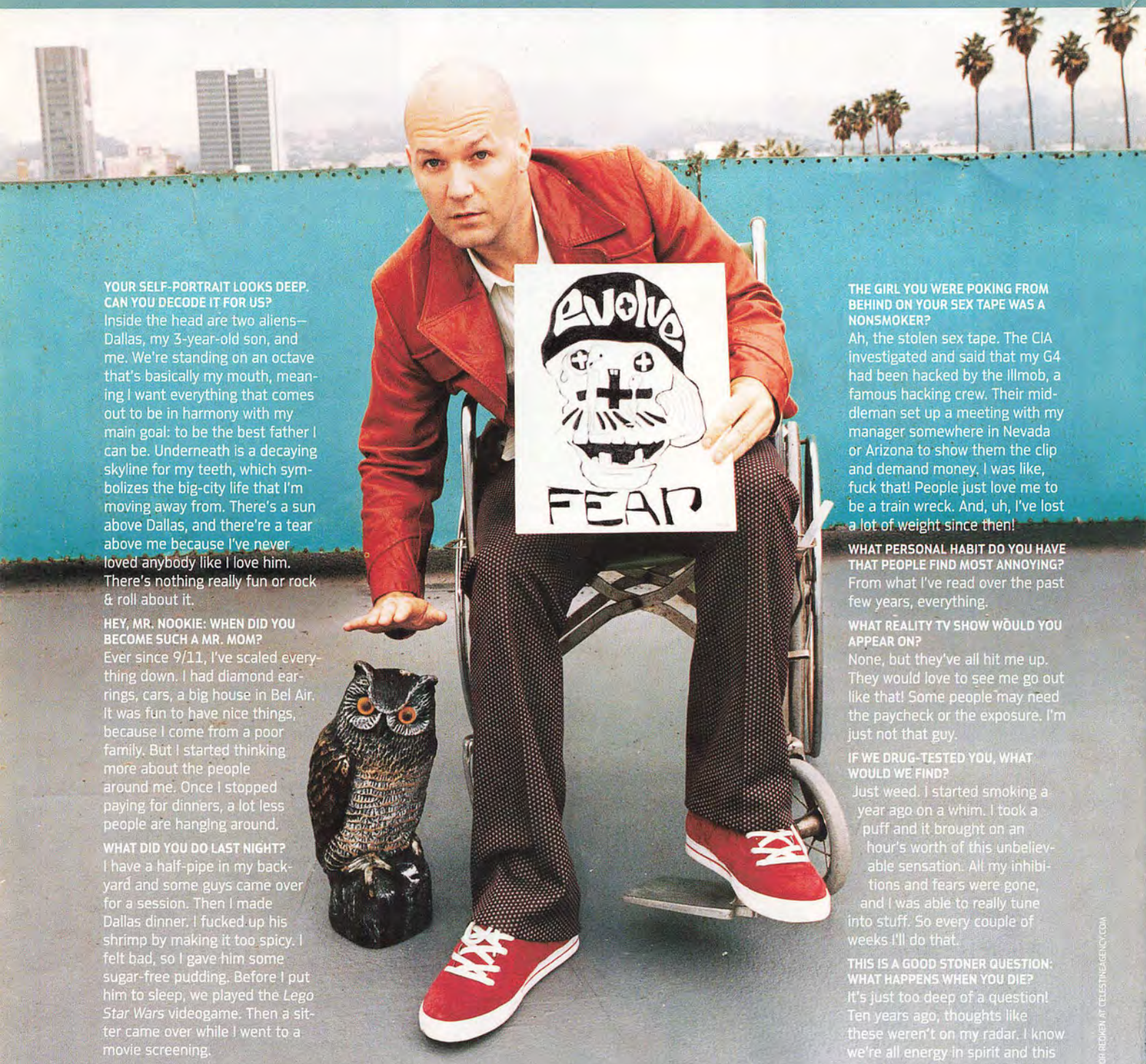
BY VICTORIA DE SILVERIO
PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS MCPHERSON

WHO DOES FRED DURST THINK HE IS?



YOUR SELF-PORTRAIT LOOKS DEEP. CAN YOU DECODE IT FOR US?
Inside the head are two aliens—Dallas, my 3-year-old son, and me. We're standing on an octave that's basically my mouth, meaning I want everything that comes out to be in harmony with my main goal: to be the best father I can be. Underneath is a decaying skyline for my teeth, which symbolizes the big-city life that I'm moving away from. There's a sun above Dallas, and there're a tear above me because I've never loved anybody like I love him. There's nothing really fun or rock & roll about it.

HEY, MR. NOOKIE: WHEN DID YOU BECOME SUCH A MR. MOM?
Ever since 9/11, I've scaled everything down. I had diamond earrings, cars, a big house in Bel Air. It was fun to have nice things, because I come from a poor family. But I started thinking more about the people around me. Once I stopped paying for dinners, a lot less people are hanging around.

WHAT DID YOU DO LAST NIGHT?
I have a half-pipe in my backyard and some guys came over for a session. Then I made Dallas dinner. I fucked up his shrimp by making it too spicy. I felt bad, so I gave him some sugar-free pudding. Before I put him to sleep, we played the *Lego Star Wars* videogame. Then a sitter came over while I went to a movie screening.

OK, DAD, HOW MUCH IS A QUART OF MILK?
I know how much Rice Dream is: $3.50. Once I realized we are the only animals that eat another animal's milk, I stopped giving my son dairy.

WHAT WAS YOUR NICKNAME AT SCHOOL?
Pop Tart and Marshmallow—I was one of the only white guys breakdancing in my town. My dad called me Chucky Chicken Lips.

YOU'RE ON A DATE. WHAT'S AN INSTANT DEAL-BREAKER?
Cigarette smoking. I hate the smell. No matter how much gum and perfume you use, you can't cover it up.

THE GIRL YOU WERE POKING FROM BEHIND ON YOUR SEX TAPE WAS A NONSMOKER?
Ah, the stolen sex tape. The CIA investigated and said that my G4 had been hacked by the Illmob, a famous hacking crew. Their middleman set up a meeting with my manager somewhere in Nevada or Arizona to show them the clip and demand money. I was like, fuck that! People just love me to be a train wreck. And, uh, I've lost a lot of weight since then!

WHAT PERSONAL HABIT DO YOU HAVE THAT PEOPLE FIND MOST ANNOYING?
From what I've read over the past few years, everything.

WHAT REALITY TV SHOW WOULD YOU APPEAR ON?
None, but they've all hit me up. They would love to see me go out like that! Some people may need the paycheck or the exposure. I'm just not that guy.

IF WE DRUG-TESTED YOU, WHAT WOULD WE FIND?
Just weed. I started smoking a year ago on a whim. I took a puff and it brought on an hour's worth of this unbelievable sensation. All my inhibitions and fears were gone, and I was able to really tune into stuff. So every couple of weeks I'll do that.

THIS IS A GOOD STONER QUESTION: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE?
It's just too deep of a question! Ten years ago, thoughts like these weren't on my radar. I know we're all energy in spirit and this is just a form that we're filling. And when energy leaves one place, it has to go onto somewhere else. But I know, if there is a heaven and a hell, I'm going to be on the good side. And I feel happy about that. [BLENDER]

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